

Information, Education, Discussion

BULLETIN in Defense of Marxism

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Who We Are

The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published monthly by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. We have dedicated this journal to the process of clarifying the program and theory of revolutionary Marxism—of discussing its application to the class struggle both internationally and here in the United States. This vital task must be undertaken if we want to forge a political party in this country capable of bringing an end to the domination of the U.S. imperialist ruling class and of establishing a socialist society based on human need instead of private greed.

The F.I.T. was created in the winter of 1984 by members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party because we opposed abandoning the Trotskyist principles and methods on which the SWP was founded and built for more than half a century. Since our formation we have fought to win the party back to a revolutionary Marxist perspective and for our readmission to the SWP. In addition our members are active in the U.S. class struggle.

At the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International, the appeals of the F.I.T. and other expelled members were upheld, and the congress delegates demanded, by an overwhelming majority, that the SWP readmit those who had been purged. So far the SWP has refused to take any steps to comply with this decision.

"All members of the party must begin to *study*, completely dispassionately and with utmost honesty, first the essence of the differences and second the course of the dispute in the party. . . . It is necessary to *study* both the one and the other, unfailingly demanding the most exact, printed documents, open to verification by all sides. Whoever believes things simply on someone else's say-so is a hopeless idiot, to be dismissed with a wave of the hand."

—V.I. Lenin, "The Party Crisis," Jan. 19, 1921.

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DEFEND MICHEL WARSHAWSKY AND THE ALTERNATIVE INFORMATION CENTER IN ISREAL

by Rafael Sabatini

A growing international campaign, demanding that Israeli authorities drop all charges against Michel Warshawsky and allow the Alternative Information Center (AIC) to resume normal functioning, has already registered a significant victory. Warshawsky, who had been held for most of the time after his arrest in solitary confinement and denied access to reading and writing materials, was released on bail March 17. The charges against him still stand, however, and the AIC remains closed.

The case began on February 17, when Israeli police raided the AIC, arrested Warshawsky and other staff members, confiscated printing equipment, and ordered the center closed for 6 months (see *Bulletin IDOM* No. 40).

Warshawsky has been charged under the so-called "prevention of terrorism act," one of the more repressive pieces of Zionist legislation. The case has attracted wide attention and condemnation in Israel itself, not only because it is the first time these laws have been used against Israeli Jews, but because the AIC, which is registered with the ministry of the interior, has long functioned as a legal printing and public information service which has been used by a wide variety of political groups as well as by international and domestic journalists and even, on several occasions, the U.S. embassy.

The closing of the center and the arrest of Warshawsky coincide with other developments, such as the harassment of Israelis who recently met with a PLO delegation in Romania and the trial behind closed doors of Israeli scientist Mordechai Vanunu—charged with revealing Israeli nuclear secrets. All of these events are viewed by many as part of a broader campaign against free speech and democratic rights on the part of Israeli authorities.

Organizations within Isreal which have protested the action against the AIC include the Association for Civil Rights, the Israeli Journalists association, the Committee to Protect Journalists, as well as a very broad list of writers and political activists. They have been joined by political and cultural figures in France, Italy, Great Britain, Mexico, the Scandinavian countries, as well as in the U.S.

AIC activists have particularly expressed their appreciation for the defense work carried out by supporters of democratic rights in the U.S. organized around the Ad Hoc Committee to Defend Michel Warshawsky and the Alternative Information Center, stating that this was particularly important in winning Warshawsky's release on bail. To date, supporters of the U.S. committee include Noam Chomsky; Professor Edward Said; Professor Filippa Strum, president of the American-Israeli Civil Liberties Coalition; and Rabbi Balfour Brickner, vice-president of the same organization.

It is important to keep up the pressure until all charges against Warshawsky have been dropped and the AIC's property, which was confiscated in the raid, has been returned. ■

Protests against the Israeli government's actions in this case are still needed. They should be sent to:

Ministry of Justice
29 Salah-Al-Din
Jersusalem 91010
Israel

Copies should go to:

Committee to Defend Michel Warshawsky
and the Alternative Information Center
c/o Berta Langston
Topping Lane
Norwald, CT 06854

or on the west coast to:

Committee to Defend Michel Warshawsky
and the Alternative Information Center
c/o Sylvia Weinstein
3435 Army St. Rm 308
San Francisco, CA 94110

INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL WARSHAWSKY

MICHEL WARSCHAWSKY, director of the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem, was released on bail on March 17. He had been arrested on February 17 in a televised raid on the Center. Alain Krivine interviewed Warschawsky on March 20.

Question. What were the official reasons given for your arrest?

Answer. The decree of the general police commissioner closing the Center and the formal charge lodged against me at the start of interrogation, as well as confidential information that the police gave to some journalists, intimated that the Center was a front run and financed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) of George Habash. It was suggested that far from being an alternative press agency and an office offering cheap composition and translation services to progressive movements, it was a cover for a liaison operation for the PFLP within the country and outside of it.

After several days of questioning the various members of the Alternative Information Center, and a detailed study of dozens of boxes of materials confiscated during the police raid, the charges were reduced to the following two points: possession of leaflets from illegal organizations and having composed material that served the publications of organizations that operated as a cover for the PFLP.

By virtue of the decree against terrorism, a British emergency decree of 1945, I was charged with "rendering services to an illegal organization."

The decree prohibiting typing or possessing banned leaflets or journals has virtually never been applied. But it provides for penalties of up to 10 years in prison. What is more, this decree stipulates that it is up to the accused to prove their innocence and not to the accusers to prove their guilt.

Q. What is the objective of the Israeli government in this case?

A. The closing of the Center and my arrest, in my opinion, had two central political objectives. First of all they wanted to hit an institution that has managed to gain a certain credibility, even with the official press, and has used this credibility

to unmask the reality of the occupation, of the repression and the resistance of the Palestinian population.

More recently, we have systematically exposed the Israeli-Jordanian maneuvers against the Palestinians. In this regard, the closing of the Center was linked to the shutting down of several Palestinian journals hostile to Jordan.

The second objective, without any doubt, was to try to reconstruct national unity, or at least to paralyze the opposition, by once again waving the peril of the terrorists, who had supposedly infiltrated the Israeli left. On this level, the operation of the Israeli authorities failed miserably.

Q. What has the reaction been in Israel? Why did the government have to release you?

A. Even the members of the security services that carried out the interrogations couldn't hide their surprise at the flood of solidarity in Israel and abroad against the closing of the Center and my arrest. Far from arousing a surge of chauvinist hysteria, these repressive measures unleashed a vast wave of protests that extended far beyond the circles of the radical and non-Zionist left.

Protests came from the Jerusalem Journalists' Association; from the very prestigious Association for Civil Rights, which is far from being a "leftist" front, who agreed to take charge of the appeal against the closing of the Center; and famous writers signed a petition. All the press reported daily on the case in a style that varied between objective neutrality and open support for our cause.

In the court hearings, dozens of friends were there. They were by no means all anti-Zionists, but they did not hesitate to show their solidarity publicly. For two weeks, solidarity pickets of 30 to 50 people stood daily across from the jail. Even among

a broader public, the authorities attempt fizzled.

My release on bail by the Supreme Court is above all a direct result of the failure of this attempt to portray me as a dangerous terrorist, despite the charge of collaborating with an organization regarded as one of the most dangerous in the struggle against Zionism.

My release can only increase solidarity, because nobody is apt to believe that the Supreme Court would free anyone who worked on behalf of the PFLP.

Q. What is the situation now?

A. I was released on 50,000 dollars bail, with a whole series of restrictions. I am banned from working for the Center, even if it is re-opened. I am forbidden to do paid or even unpaid work in anything that has to do with printing or publishing. I have to report to the police three times a week.

All these restrictions are in force until the trial, for which the date has not yet been set. On the other hand, the appeal in the Jerusalem district court against the closing of the Alternative Information Center began this week.

Q. What are the next tests? What is the role for solidarity now?

A. Now, we are waiting for the date of the trial. That gives us a certain breathing space to give a new impetus to local and international solidarity. This has been decisive in forcing the various retreats on the part of the authorities, such as ending the interrogations after two weeks, which is not long for the security services; their rapid presentation of a cobbled together indictment; and, finally, my release on bail.

It is important today to center solidarity around two axes — the demand for the immediate reopening of the Alternative Information Center and the dropping of the charges against me. The Israeli government, especially its Labor Party wing, remains very sensitive to Western public opinion, especially in the various Jewish communities.

Finally, it is important that the financial campaign continue. All our material was confiscated. And my friends do not want, come what may, to stop the publication of alternative information for technical reasons. Without that, as many Israelis have acknowledged recently, it would be hard to know the reality that lies behind the statements of the spokespersons for the occupation forces.

This interview is reprinted from International Viewpoint, April 6, 1987. We have not changed IV's spelling conventions.

PALESTINIAN SUPPORTERS HARASSED IN LOS ANGELES

by Walter Lippmann

In an attempt to divert public attention from the unfolding Iran/Conragate scandal and the seizure of additional U.S. hostages by Muslim fundamentalists in Beirut, Lebanon, and to prevent discussion of U.S. policy in the Middle East, the Reagan administration seized nine hostages in Los Angeles in late January.

Arrested at 7:00 A.M. at gunpoint, taken from their homes in shackles and chains, the nine (eight Palestinians and a Kenyan) were kept in solitary confinement until their February 18 bail hearing.

Some of the mass media attempted to build up a lynch atmosphere. The Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner*, for example, used headlines like "War on terrorism hits L.A." (January 27), and "L.A. terror group suspects held in solitary" (January 29).

The nine, all legal residents of the United States, have been charged with violations of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration Act. It is a deportable offense under this statute to be affiliated with "any organization that causes to be written . . . printed . . . or displayed, written or printed material advocating or teaching economic, international and governmental doctrines of communism."

The government claims the nine are members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a component of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The defendants have all denied PFLP membership.

Defenders of civil liberties and members of the Arab community rallied quickly and energetically. Two days after the arrests, 100 demonstrators marched outside the Federal building in downtown Los Angeles during the initial legal proceeding. At that hearing, Immigration Judge Thomas Fong approved continued detention of the immigrants, including keeping them in solitary confinement, stating, "From what I've seen so far, solitary confinement may be an appropriate action," because the charges "may involve national security endangerment."

Federal officials have refused to publicly reveal the factual basis they claim for the charges or their requests that the defendants be held without bail. The government was handed a major setback on February 17 when the nine were ordered released, on their own recognizance or on low bail, when the Immigration and Naturalization Service refused to disclose in open court what evidence they claim to have against the nine.

As the details of the case, and of the government's conduct in it, have begun to surface, the utterly fraudulent and entirely political nature of the charges has become clearer.

Insufficient Evidence

Government surveillance of the defendants began as far back as 1983. An FBI agent even rented the apartment next door to two of the defendants for several months prior to the arrests. The defendants had been politically active in numerous organizations, including the Arab-American Institute, Palestinian music and cultural groups, the November 29th Committee for Palestine, the Democratic Party, and the Rainbow Coalition. These are all legal organizations.

The reason the government is attempting to deport the nine was explained by Los Angeles *Times* reporter Ronald Soble on February 6: "An FBI investigation of a group of Arab immigrants in the Los Angeles area, aimed at proving they engaged in terrorist activities, failed to produce enough evidence for a criminal case, so deportation was recommended, government officials said Thursday.

"The FBI then terminated its 10-month investigation, turning its information over to immigration authorities late last year with the recommendation that the immigrants be deported through a proceeding where the burden of proof is less than would have been required in federal court."

The crux of the government's case now turns on surveillance photographs of some of the defendants at Los Angeles International Airport, picking up bundles of magazines published by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. These publications, *Democratic Palestine* and *Al Hadaf*, have been publicly sold in Arab communities in the United States for years. They have been available by subscription to libraries and to individuals interested in the politics of the Palestinian movement.

Also brought to light in connection with this case has been a secret INS plan for stepped-up spying, registration, invalidation of visas, and roundups of nationals from several Arab nations considered to constitute a potential "terrorist threat" to the U.S. in the event of an "emergency." The INS Alien Deportation Center in Oakdale, Louisiana is already available for this purpose, which is reminiscent of the internment of the Japanese-Americans during World War II.

Broad Public Support

All of these developments have helped mobilize broad public support for the struggle of the nine. Three hundred demonstrated at the bail hearing February 18. Favorable editorials appeared in

a number of metropolitan dailies around the country, including two by the Los Angeles Times.

Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and the National Lawyers Guild have spoken out. ACLU attorneys have joined with attorneys Leonard Weinglass and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and others on the defense team.

Elected officials, including U.S. representatives Mervyn Dymally, George Crockett, and John Conyers, have endorsed the defense. Prominent individuals have endorsed including Rev. Jesse Jackson, Kathy Spiller, president of Los Angeles National Organization for Women, and Ramona Ripston of People for the American Way.

This is, however, much more than an abstract civil liberties case. All who are concerned with and politically active in opposition to U.S. foreign policy, all who protest U.S. intervention in Central America or U.S. complicity with South African apartheid, have a strong stake in the outcome of the case. Thus, numerous groups actively organizing protests on these issues have come out in support of the nine, along with Arab-American organizations and the New Jewish Agenda. They all understand that an injury to one is an injury to all—that if the Reagan administration succeeds in its attack against these activists it

will have a chilling effect on many others.

Protests Planned

The deportation hearing is now set for April 28. Protest vigils are projected in 20 cities around the country on that date. Our readers are strongly urged to support the work of the Committee for Justice in the following ways:

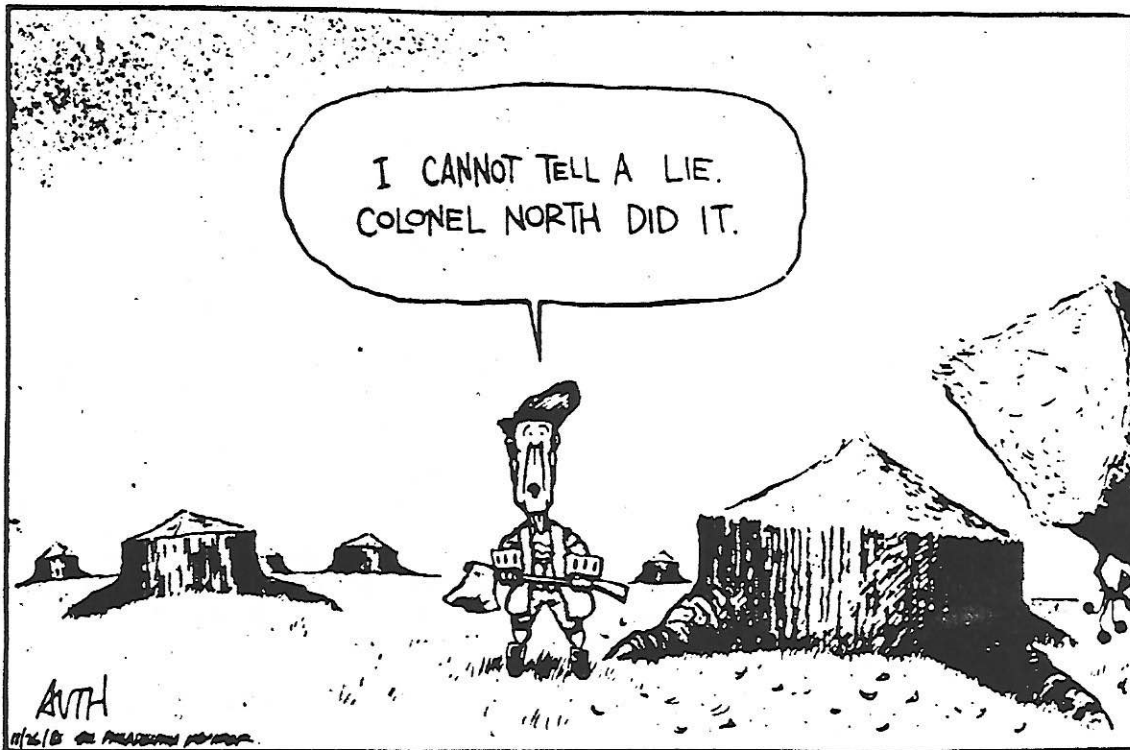
- Endorse the work and demands of the Committee for Justice: 1) Drop the deportation case against the nine defendants; 2) Call for a Congressional inquiry into violations and abuses by the FBI and INS in this case; and 3) Investigate the constitutionality of, and civil rights violations contained within the INS memo.

- Help to secure individual and organizational endorsements for the Committee for Justice.

- Contribute financially to the work of the Committee for Justice.

The Committee for Justice may be reached at P.O. Box 4631, Los Angeles, CA. 90052. Telephone: 213-250-1060 or 250-9118. ■

March 22, 1987



NEW MASS STRUGGLES IN EASTERN EUROPE

Hungarians March; Yugoslavs Strike

by Tom Barrett

Over the last several months we have seen a challenge to the Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship in China. Social forces unleashed by the rise of Solidarnosc in Poland continue to threaten the stability of Jaruzelski's regime in that country. And Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* ("openness") has encouraged democratic aspirations in the USSR.

Now, two new challenges to Stalinism are developing. In Hungary, on March 15, 1,500 people marched for democracy and against foreign domination in a commemoration of the defeated Hungarian revolution of 1848. In Yugoslavia, over 10,000 workers—according to official reports—have gone out in wildcat strikes against austerity measures. How far these struggles will go and how far the Hungarian and Yugoslav bureaucracies will go in trying to repress or co-opt them remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the anti-bureaucratic struggle is spreading throughout the deformed and degenerated workers' states.

Hungarian "Market Socialism"

For a number of years Hungary has been allowing a significant amount of private enterprise in both small-scale manufacturing and trade. This policy of "market socialism" is almost identical to Deng Xiaoping's economic policies in China. Budapest has hoped, through this mechanism, to accomplish two economic goals: increased trade with the capitalist West in both commodities and financing, and improvements in the people's standard of living. In Hungary there has been less emphasis on technological advancement and modernization than there has been in China, partly because Hungary is more advanced already and partly because, unlike China, it has no aspirations of becoming a military power.

Since the "market socialism" policy has been in effect, Hungary has contrasted sharply with its neighbors. Consumer goods are much more readily available there than in any other Eastern European country, including the Soviet Union. Shoppers on Budapest's Vaci Street are able to buy goods imported from all over the world, and, though a pair of blue jeans costs the equivalent of a week's pay for most workers, there is no shortage of demand for them. Foreign visitors to Eastern Europe report a much more relaxed atmosphere in Hungary than in any of its post-capitalist neighbors.

The Hungarian experience with a market-regulated economy raises the perennial question, "Does socialism work?" Bourgeois critics are, of course,

more than ready to point to "capitalist methods" in Hungary and contrast their success to the problems of the other Eastern European states. But the real answer is that socialism has not yet been tried anywhere in the world, and that is not simply because of Stalinism—though Stalinism is an important obstacle which makes it that much more difficult for the working class to overcome the inherent problems of the transition to socialism.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, if not earlier, national economies have been subsumed into a single world economy. Massive industrialization in Western Europe, the United States, and Japan—and the resulting concentration of capital in the great banking houses—has led to global interdependence. Technological advances in transportation and communication have made a single world economy possible and have brought it into existence. Anything even remotely resembling national self-sufficiency is unachievable today.

This world economy is *capitalist*. Modern methods of production and trade require great amounts of capital, and those quantities can only be raised by consortiums of the biggest banking houses. The banks are only willing to invest their money if they are reasonably sure of a profit.

Socialism has not come into existence in Eastern Europe, nor could it have. The countries of Eastern Europe, like every other country, must trade in the capitalist world market; they are affected by global economic trends; they need foreign credits and a multitude of goods that can only be imported. This will be true as long as the imperialists' domination of the world continues. And since the Stalinist bureaucracies which dominate the USSR, Eastern Europe, China, etc. *have no perspective for overthrowing imperialism, but rather of "coexisting" with it*, they find themselves caught in an ultimately insurmountable contradiction between the socialized property forms on which their domination of the workers' states is based, and the pressures of the international market economy. On top of that they have all of the problems inherent in attempting to manage a complex national economy through arbitrary, bureaucratic planning measures.

The resulting crisis is *not* a crisis of socialism or of economic planning, but a crisis of bureaucratic rule. If the Hungarian ruling caste found a road to temporarily alleviate their difficulties through "market socialism," it has only been at the expense of an increase in other contradictions which will eventually threaten the bureaucratic regime.

The question which actually applies to Hungary is not, "Does socialism work?" but, "Can a bureaucratically dominated government and economy provide for people's needs and advance the struggle for socialism?" The answer to that is a resounding, "No!" It is impossible to build "socialism in one country," the utopian conception of Stalinism. But bureaucratic methods also fail to accomplish even what is possible in a post-capitalist society. China has made great strides since its revolution, but these are a mere fraction of what could have been done had there been conditions of genuine workers' democracy.

Workers' democracy is one of the key components of the overall solution to this dilemma faced by the bureaucratized workers' states. It was precisely workers' democracy which was the rallying cry in the streets of Budapest on March 15.

March 15

On March 15, 1848, Hungarian liberal nationalists proclaimed a constitutional monarchy within the Austrian empire. A year later, Hungary declared itself an independent republic. The Hapsburg monarchy, in alliance with Tsarist Russia, crushed the new republic and executed its leaders. Hungary achieved limited autonomy later in the nineteenth century and became an independent kingdom after World War I. Since then, March 15 has been a day of national commemoration, and for over a generation both the government and its opponents have staged observances of the day. The anti-government observance this year drew 1,500 people, mostly young. By all accounts it was the largest of its kind since 1956.

The demonstrators' demands were expressed by Gyorgy Gado, speaking at the monument to Lajos Kossuth, leader of the 1848 revolution: "Hungarian democracy will be reborn. For that, we will need freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of the press. . . . We commemorate the martyrs who in 1848 and '49, and since then, shed their blood for the freedom of the nation. We hope the day will come when there will be a memorial for Imre Nagy."

The reference to Nagy was particularly significant. Nagy was the Prime Minister of Hungary in 1956, who reluctantly assumed the leadership of the 1956 revolution. The Soviet-imposed regime of Janos Kadar, which remains in power, executed Nagy and other ministers of his government, and to this day he has not been exonerated. Another demand raised by the demonstrators was for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, a promise which was made thirty years ago and still has not been kept.

Though agents of the secret police mingled with the demonstrators, there was no attempt on their part to stop the march, and no violent confrontations occurred.

This demonstration in Hungary illustrated an important aspect of a revolutionary Marxist perspective for political revolution in Eastern Europe. The national question—the basic democratic demand for independence from Soviet domination—

can play an important role in mobilizing the proletariat of these states against their current governments. The national sentiment of Hungarians, Poles, etc. is a progressive force which should be hailed and encouraged by the revolutionary Marxist movement.

Strike Wave in Yugoslavia

Those who would consider "market socialism" to be a solution to the problems of shortages and underdevelopment would be well advised to take a look at Yugoslavia, where limited private enterprise, trade with the West, and a limited shop-floor democracy called "workers' self-management" have been in effect since before 1950.

In a number of respects Yugoslavian history and society are more analogous to China or Vietnam than to Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc. For one thing, Yugoslavia was as underdeveloped and poor as any semicolonial country before World War II. It remains underdeveloped and poor, though there have been great improvements because of the planned economy. Furthermore, the Yugoslavian workers' state, though established by a Stalinist Communist Party, was not the result of postwar occupation by the Soviet Army. Tito's Partisans actually received more aid from Britain than they did from the USSR, and they took power entirely on their own, in defiance of Stalin's direct orders.

The important issue of Soviet domination, with which Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, and Bulgaria are faced, was decisively settled in Yugoslavia in 1948. Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform and broke diplomatic relations with Moscow at that time. Since then, it has traded with the capitalist West and allowed relatively free travel for its own citizens abroad and for foreigners within the country. Nevertheless, the League of Communists, as the ruling party is called, has complete dictatorial power. No competing parties are permitted, and speech and assembly have been severely restricted since the inception of the Yugoslavian workers' state.

At issue in Yugoslavia, at least at present, are economic matters. Yugoslavia depends on trade with capitalist countries; however, it has little to offer in exchange. During the 1960s and early 1970s its most important export was its own surplus labor-force—workers who took unskilled jobs in the West German factories. The generalized downturn in world capitalism since the mid-1970s has had a severe effect on Yugoslavia. Most of the "guest-workers" have had to come home, and the Western financiers have seen little reason to invest in the Yugoslavian economy. The result has been a serious problem of foreign debt and runaway inflation.

In order to deal with this, the Yugoslavian government earlier this year imposed a wage freeze and other austerity measures, cutting wages back to the average level of the last quarter of 1986 and pegging all future wage increases to increases in productivity. Strikes broke out in early March throughout Yugoslavia. The largest concentration—

about half of the strikes reported—has occurred in Croatia, the most industrially developed of the Yugoslav republics.

Prime Minister Branko Mikulic threatened on March 22 to mobilize the army against the strikers and has refused any dialogue or compromise with the striking workers, though to date the government has not moved decisively against them.

What Solution?

Trade with the West and a limited amount of private enterprise may alleviate some of the economic shortages, but both Hungary and Yugoslavia demonstrate the inadequacies of "market socialism." It can never satisfy the people's democratic aspirations, as Hungary shows, and it cannot even insure economic prosperity, as Yugoslavia illustrates. The problem in both countries, and in fact in all of the post-capitalist countries, is that the socialist revolution remains unfinished.

In most of the post-capitalist world, that is, in those countries dominated by Stalinist parties, the state apparatus has become an absolute obstacle to the completion of socialist revolution. This is the case in both Yugoslavia and Hungary. Those who wield state power do not govern with the consent of the governed, and they have totally failed to advance the interests of the workers whom they claim to represent. Furthermore, they defend their power and privileges with military force and police repression, often relying on the most brutal means. Consequently, they cannot

be removed from power by gradual reforms or peaceful transition.

Revolution is necessary to oust the Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe, the USSR, China, Korea, and Vietnam. It must be a revolution which will not change the class character of these states, but will put in power *genuine* representatives of the working class, who have been elected to advance the workers' interests and who can be removed from office quickly and easily if they do not. Such a revolution is called a *political* revolution, in contrast to the social revolution which remains on the agenda in the United States and all other countries where the state remains in the hands of the bankers and businessmen.

An example of this kind of struggle can be seen if we look at what took place in Poland with the rise of Solidarnosc. A combination of labor strikes and demonstrations for democracy and national independence began in that country in 1980. The revolutionary process there has not been crushed to this day, despite the defeat which it suffered with Jaruzelski's military coup in 1981. A genuine proletarian revolutionary leadership is even now beginning to emerge in Poland, and it has begun the process of building a party to lead the political revolution. From similar beginnings the political revolutionary process has a chance to grow in Hungary and Yugoslavia. This fact both reflects, and compounds, the ongoing crisis of Stalinism as an international system—a crisis which is becoming increasingly manifest with each passing day. ■

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a monthly journal published by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, a group of expelled members of the Socialist Workers Party who are seeking reinstatement in that party.

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RADICAL POLITICS AND THE RUSSIAN QUESTION

by Frank Lovell

"The Russian question is with us once again, as it has been at every critical turning point of the international labor movement since November 7, 1917."

James P. Cannon, Speech to SWP members
New York, October 15, 1939

In light of the most recent developments in the Soviet Union, and their repercussions in the radical movement in the U.S., Cannon's observation almost fifty years ago is again pertinent.

The October Revolution in Russia changed nearly everything in the realm of politics at the time of the First World War, especially the struggle of the working class throughout the world to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism. The revolutionists in Russia proved that capitalism can be overthrown and workers can establish their own government. They then attempted to organize the struggle for socialism on a world scale along the lines of their success as defined by the ideological and organizational leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. They established in 1919 a new international working-class organization, the Third International.

They expected that the more politically advanced working class in Europe would welcome the new movement and follow the Russian example. But not all did. The two main political currents that emerged in the struggle to extend the Russian revolution were the revolutionary socialists (communists), who wanted to follow the Russian leadership, and the Social Democrats who opposed it.

Revolutionary uprisings in Germany and other European countries were defeated in the first years after the victory in Russia. The revolution was forced to retreat, giving rise to a conservative bureaucratic caste in the newly-formed workers' state, the Soviet Union. By the end of the first decade of the revolution the bureaucratic caste had seized control of the state apparatus, driven out the revolutionary leadership, and suppressed the working class. The usurping bureaucracy was led by Joseph Stalin who personified the parasitic caste.

Thereafter a third influential political current arose within the working-class political movement throughout the world, Stalinism. It was attached to and supported the interests of the bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union, seeking to preserve the existing balance of power among the capitalist countries and to identify the needs of the working class in all countries with the diplomacy of the Soviet government.

Three Currents Today

These three main working-class political currents—revolutionary socialism, Social Democracy, and Stalinism—exist today and are easily identified by their distinct responses to events in the Soviet Union. In recent months the Soviet bureaucracy, in turmoil, is introducing drastic changes in its dictatorial method of government in a desperate effort to overcome economic stagnation and social lethargy. This stimulates interest among the working masses and exploited peoples under capitalism. The response of the established working-class political parties is, for the most part, predictable.

Revolutionary socialists, represented by the sections and sympathizing organizations of the Fourth International, welcome these developments in the Soviet Union as signs that the contradictions of the Stalinist system are mounting, that the Soviet workers are pressing their own demands, and that they may rise up against the hated bureaucracy. We are convinced that the only historically progressive solution to the economic and social problems in the Soviet Union, given its present stage of degeneration, is the revolutionary overthrow of the bureaucracy by the Soviet working class and the restoration of workers' democracy and workers' control. (See "Soviet Bureaucracy in Turmoil," *Bulletin IDOM* No. 39.)

Social Democrats

The Social Democrats have responded, characteristically, in exactly the opposite way. They have been convinced from the beginning that the Russian workers never should have seized power, that it was a mistake for them to have tried to establish their own government in 1917, and that the Stalinist dictatorship is the historical vindication of their opposition to revolution.

They assume an understanding attitude toward the present problems of the Soviet bureaucracy and counsel that the most satisfactory solution will be found in the restoration of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. This stance is summarized in the current issue (Winter 1987) of *Dissent* magazine. A member of the editorial board, Erazim Kohak, writes from Vienna: "Socialist and social democratic leaders are anxious to reassure the voters (in Austria) that they do not intend to threaten the industrial goose that lays such gratifying golden eggs as washing machines, automobiles, and color televisions with videocassette

recorders. Ever since the trauma of the Bolshevik revolution, the socialists have cautiously offered a more equitable distribution of such golden eggs or better conditions in their production, but no grand visions (such as socialism).

"The heirs of the Bolsheviks who, a generation ago, paid at least lip service to an alternative vision," says Kohak, "have swung into line as well. Though Gorbachev has not revived Khrushchev's slogan about 'catching up to and surpassing' the capitalists, his policy is clearly aimed at building not socialism but an authoritarian consumerism." The possibility of proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union is excluded, as elsewhere in the world. The Social Democratic attitude has not undergone much change since 1917.

Stalinism

The Stalinist influence in the working-class political movement has declined in recent years. Its mass parties in France and Italy have lost much of their vote-catching ability in the parliamentary arena. The inability of Stalinism to provide leadership in working-class struggles against capitalist exploitation and oppression has discredited the Communist parties in Europe and America. (It's Maoist variant, which had great influence among the radicalizing youth of the 1960s and 70s, has become totally insignificant.) Nevertheless, Stalinist ideology—the concept that the working class must seek political collaboration with "progressive" sectors of the capitalist class—pervades the radical movement.

This class-collaborationist policy is not essentially different from the gradualism of Social Democracy. The distinction is in their divided loyalties to the Soviet bureaucracy and to the ruling class in their native countries. In their opposing attitudes toward the Soviet bureaucracy the Social Democrats see nothing good in the Soviet Union, the Stalinists can see nothing bad.

In response to the present crisis of government in the Soviet Union, the U.S. Communist Party reacted at first with a mixture of surprise and feigned ignorance. Last December—when Andrei Sakharov was released from exile in Gorky, brought back to Moscow, and allowed to speak freely to journalists—newspapers around the world were quoting Gorbachev on the Soviet social crisis and the urgent need of governmental reforms. Just at this time, the *People's Daily World* (the CP newspaper published in New York) on Friday, December 26, ran a feature story, dateline Moscow. It was about "The USSR's crusade for 'perestroika'—an overhaul or restructuring of the entire Soviet economic and social order, which has already brought impressive results." What are these results? The story consisted exclusively of interviews with "the Soviet people" in Moscow. Everyone interviewed gave substantially the same answer. It was summarized in bold type: "I'm quite sure the Soviet people have all the rights and freedoms they want. But it is one thing to know you have

certain rights, and quite another one to learn to use this right in full measure." That was supposed to be the verbatim statement of a twenty-year-old woman college student.

As more stories were released about the crimes of the secret police and the lists of victimized citizens in exile, in jails, in hard labor camps, and in psychiatric wards, the *People's Daily World* took little notice. Finally, in the January 28 issue it broke the startling news that "Gorbachev stresses need to strengthen people's rule." This was supposed to be a summary of Gorbachev's report to the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee, January 27; but it reported nothing about the problems Gorbachev actually stressed, only that the results of his campaign were already visible in *actual economic performance*. The intended impression was that things were good before; now they are getting better in every way.

In these ways the political parties and representatives of the main political currents in the working class of the U.S. have reacted predictably to the latest news from Moscow. But there are certain subcurrents that surface from time to time. The most powerful and influential of these is the Castroist tendency which demonstrated its revolutionary capacity in 1959 by leading the popular uprising in Cuba that overthrew the Batista dictatorship and established a workers' government. Under constant pressure from U.S. imperialism, this government headed by Fidel Castro has established an alliance with the Soviet Union.

The Castro regime places severe curbs on workers' democracy and working-class decision making, but it is far from becoming a Stalinist regime such as that in the Soviet Union. It adapts to Stalinist politics and Soviet diplomacy, and it is careful not to criticize the blunders and crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy.

Castroism exercises greater influence in the radical and revolutionary movement of Central America—and probably in most of Latin America—than Stalinism does. It is perceived by millions as a genuine revolutionary force because of its effective anti-imperialist propaganda and its successful strategy in constant struggle against the North American goliath. For this reason it enjoys broad sympathy and well-deserved support in the radical movement in the U.S. But it has also attracted a wide circle of assorted sycophants.

Sycophantic Radicalism

The most notable example of this sycophantic eddy in the mainstream of U.S. radicalism is the present leadership of the Socialist Workers Party which abandoned the revolutionary program upon which the party was founded in favor of an adaptation to Castroism. Under the leadership of National Secretary Jack Barnes, this group is mindful not to offend Castro politically while permitting

themselves slightly more latitude to criticize Stalinism than Castro allows himself and his administration in Cuba. This adaptation by the SWP leadership conditions their response to events in the Soviet Union. The forensic techniques they employ here especially interest us because we see in this method the same duplicity that was used in the bureaucratic expulsions of the Trotskyist wing of the SWP during the 1981-83 period.

Doug Jenness, coeditor of the *Militant* newspaper, was assigned the task of presenting the Barnesite position on the Gorbachev reforms. He started off with an article in the January 9 issue of the paper. The lead sentence shows the writer's delicate touch: "On December 16 Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev phoned physicist Andrei Sakharov, who had been living in exile in Gorky since 1980, to inform him that he was free to return to Moscow and resume his scientific work." Here we see how Jenness approaches his subject on tiptoe, reluctant to blurt out that Sakharov was the victim of brutal police repression. He cautiously slips in further information: that Yelena Bonner was pardoned and would be allowed to return to Moscow with her husband, Sakharov; that Mustafa Dzhemilev, a Tatar nationalist, was released from prison; that several other political prisoners have been released since Gorbachev took office in 1985. In addition, there has been a "broader relaxation of restrictions on writers, artists, and journalists."

Halfway through the article we learn that "the ending of Sakharov's and Bonner's forced exile and release of other prisoners will be rightly cheered by working people in the Soviet Union and throughout the world." Why? Well, first of all, because they "were not charged with committing criminal acts or organizing sabotage against the Soviet workers' state." Therefore, their incarceration "was not in the interests of working people." The reader might infer from this that if all these individuals had been victims of frame-up charges concerning sabotage, such as the Stalinist government has often used in the past, then their jailing would have been justified.

So as to make clear who Sakharov is, Jenness runs down a list of anti-Soviet, procapitalist statements uttered by Sakharov while in prison and exile, and trumpeted throughout the world by the capitalist press. This proves, Jenness says, that "Sakharov doesn't speak for or represent the interests of working people in the Soviet Union or anywhere else in the world."

Why, then, was it good to release Sakharov?

Here is the answer, as stated by Jenness: "His release from exile . . . opens a bit more space for workers, peasants and other progressive-minded people to express their views in the Soviet Union. And it takes away a weapon the imperialist propagandists can use."

So we see here in the course of this twisted argumentation how the victim, Sakharov, becomes an anti-hero; and the representative of the oppressive bureaucratic system, Gorbachev, almost emerges

as the anti-imperialist hero, destroying the propaganda weapons of imperialism.

Class Character of the Soviet Union

In the January 23 issue of the *Militant*, Jenness began a series of articles on the class character of the Soviet Union, the rise of the bureaucracy, and Soviet foreign policy. This was not given a very prominent place in the paper, but the effort continued for six weeks in the misnamed column, "learning about socialism." The first two articles explained simply and clearly why the Soviet Union is not capitalist and not imperialist. It is not capitalist, Jenness said, because "the Soviet Union has no big capitalists, landlords, or private bankers. There are no ruling families like the Rockefellers, Mellons, Duponts, Weyerhauseres, etc., who own and control banks, factories, mines, transportation, oil wells, and vast tracts of land; and operate them for their own profit."

The Soviet Union is not imperialist. Jenness correctly says, "There are no Soviet bankers getting rich off interest payments from the Third World. There is no piling up of surplus capital that is driving an exploiting class to look for profitable investments. The USSR's ties with countries like Cuba, for example, are quite different than U.S. imperialist relations with that country before 1959."

Rise of Bureaucracy

At the end of the second article, Jenness promised to explain "Moscow's invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968." Here he begins to skate on thin ice. Castro has pronounced himself in support of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. So Jenness must approach this issue cautiously. In his third article he scurried back to the question of the bureaucracy. "How did the parasitic caste arise in the USSR?" he asks.

Jenness explains that it is a privileged social stratum that arose from the economic scarcity and revolutionary exhaustion of the Civil War period following the seizure of power by the proletariat in Russia, and was nurtured by the isolation which resulted from the failure of the revolution in Europe. "This layer, however, did not acquire the essential characteristics of a new ruling class," Jenness says. "Unlike the capitalist or slaveowning classes, this privileged bureaucratic formation didn't take shape as a result of deeply-rooted needs of production. Slaveowners are necessary to an economy based on slave labor; capitalists are indispensable to production based on wage labor. But the privileged layer that emerged in the Soviet Union and still exists there is not necessary to an economy based on nationalized property and centralized planning. To the contrary," he says, "it is an obstacle to the most rational and equitable development of a planned economy. It is a parasitic growth on the new

economic foundations established by the workers. It more closely resembles a caste than a class."

Faint Praise

None of this, so far as it goes, deviates from Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy. There is no other source so convincing or useful. For a better understanding of the question, Jenness recommends *The Third International After Lenin* and *The Revolution Betrayed*. Both books are by Trotsky. Jenness says, "The most prominent leader of the Soviet government to continue carrying out a revolutionary internationalist course was Leon Trotsky."

For the fourth article of his series Jenness promised to examine "whether or not there's anything progressive about the Soviet bureaucracy's foreign policy," but he wrote mainly about the Soviet foreign policy in Lenin's time. In the February 20 issue of the *Militant*, Jenness returned to the touchy question he had mentioned earlier, "Why the Soviet Union invaded Hungary and Czechoslovakia." He concluded his observations on this matter with the following commonplace discovery: "It's not empire building, but preservation of the parasitic caste that leads the Soviet leadership to ruthlessly crush revolts of working people in Eastern Europe as well as in the USSR."

Essentials of Soviet Foreign Policy

Any serious examination of Soviet foreign policy must deal with the dismantling of the Third International in Stalin's time and the foreign policy centerpiece, "peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world," which derives from the Stalinist theory of socialism in one country. This was substituted for the Leninist theory and strategy of world revolution in 1928 and has remained officially in place ever since. Gorbachev does not propose to alter this in any fundamental way.

Jenness has conveniently skipped over this awkward matter, and in his concluding article occupies himself with "Lenin's last and unfinished political fight," the struggle against the bureaucracy. He fails to mention that the main burden of

that struggle fell to Trotsky. Instead he winds up with the announcement that the Barnesite publishing house, Pathfinder Press, plans to issue a new book of Lenin's last speeches, articles, memoranda and letters and notebooks of his secretaries. The implication is that nothing of importance happened in the struggle against the bureaucracy after 1924.

For those who are especially interested in how the historic struggle against the Stalinist degeneration began, there is available an amply documented account, *Lenin's Last Struggle* by Moshe Lewin, published by Monthly Review Press, New York, N.Y. Also, Pathfinder published most of the relevant material in 1975 under the title *Lenin's Fight Against Stalinism*, by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky. This documents "the converging views of Lenin and Trotsky on the growth of the Soviet bureaucracy," according to Pathfinder's latest catalog. But now those in control of that press are no longer interested in such documentation, which explains why they are bringing out another book—using much of the same material with a new twist.

Bureaucratic Self-Reform?

The question which Jenness is fully aware of but avoids raising is whether the Soviet bureaucracy is capable of self-reform. This question was thoroughly explored by Trotsky as long ago as 1937 in his definitive book, *The Revolution Betrayed*, in which he concluded that the proletarian revolution in the USSR is necessary and inevitable. "Will the bureaucrat devour the workers' state, or will the working class clean up the bureaucrat? Thus stands the question upon whose decision hangs the fate of the Soviet Union," said Trotsky. He saw no possibility of self-reform for the "greedy, lying and cynical caste of rulers."

The opening chapter of an incidental tale connected to the main story of the events now unfolding in the Soviet Union was concluded in the February 27 issue of the *Militant* when Jenness took a well-deserved vacation. More is sure to follow. ■

March 17, 1987

WHERE IS THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY GOING?

by Steve Bloom

The March issue of the *International Socialist Review* (supplement to the March 20 *Militant* newspaper) carries three articles dealing with the current state of the Socialist Workers Party. The first is by Doug Jenness and covers a report made by SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes to the party National Committee on February 20, 1987; the second deals with a Pittsburgh gathering of party activists from coal-mining regions which took place February 21-22; and the third is a report on recent advances by the Young Socialist Alliance. Taken together these three items paint a revealing portrait of the state of the SWP today, and of the perspectives which are currently being developed by the party leadership. Four main themes can be noted:

- The SWP has been on the decline for more than a decade. This decline has taken the form of a decrease in membership, a shrinkage in sales of the party press, and a breakdown in day-to-day functioning and activity. This decline of the party is attributed by the SWP leadership to objective factors—the general retreat in the American class struggle during this same time frame (the take-back offensive by the ruling class, passivity of the unions, etc.).

- There has now been a basic shift in the objective circumstances laying the basis for an end to the party's decline. The party has stopped becoming smaller (though it isn't growing, recruitment has simply begun to replace losses) and the YSA has gone through a dramatic growth spurt. This, too, is a result of an objective change, the beginning of the end of the retreat by the U.S. working class.

- There are two central features to this change in objective conditions: 1) the experience of the P-9 strike and a generally increased resistance within the working class to continued concessions; and 2) the development of a higher level of "anti-imperialist unity" on an international scale, represented by the formation of the Anti-Imperialist Organization of the Caribbean and Central America.

- The development of this "anti-imperialist unity" creates the potential for a major breakthrough for "communist regroupment" in the U.S.A., as well as internationally.

The last point is of particular significance for Fourth Internationalists in the United States who belong to the organizations created by those

expelled from the SWP during the party leadership's 1982-84 purge of the organization (the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, Socialist Action, and the Fourth International Caucus of Solidarity) as well as for the Fourth International itself. In this article we will examine the four themes developed by Barnes in his report concerning the current situation in the U.S. class struggle, take up the problem of the anti-Marxist methodology employed by the present leaders of the SWP, and conclude with some remarks about the proper way to try to overcome the present crisis of the Socialist Workers Party.

Decline of the SWP

There can be no dispute, of course, that the political fortunes of the SWP have been on the eclipse for a number of years. In every measure—membership, mass influence, circulation of the press, etc.—the party has been seriously undermined.

But it is untrue, as Jack Barnes asserts, that this decline can be solely, or even primarily, attributed to unfavorable objective conditions. Such an answer is too simplistic (particularly with regard to the most recent period). It is not designed to be a serious analysis, but to absolve the present party leadership—which has been the leadership during this entire time—of its share of responsibility for the present condition of the organization.

What Barnes says about the objective conditions of the U.S. class struggle over the last five to ten years is true so far as it goes. This has been a time of retreat and disorganization for the working class. It has been marked by concessions, plant closings (in particular union plants), union-busting bankruptcies and mergers, etc. Most of those who tried to resist the concessions drive have been defeated—though there were a few notable exceptions. The result is a drastic decline in union membership in this country, which is now at its lowest percentage since the victory of the CIO organizing drives in the 1930s.

But there are a number of mediating factors which Barnes leaves out of his account. In the first place, despite the retreat of the organized workers' movement there has been a modest increase, during this same period, of radical sentiment among more conscious working-class elements. This is illustrated, for example, by the dramatic growth of interest in publications such as *Labor Notes* and the steady increase in attendance at the conferences held periodically by that newsletter.

It is probably safe to say that most radical currents which made an effort to involve themselves in a serious way in trade union struggles over the last five years have found that their influence has grown, and that they have been able to recruit a few people out of the unions. This has not been true of the SWP.

The *dramatic* decline of the party—more than half its membership in a ten-year span—might be explained by objective conditions if we had experienced a period of *extreme* conservatism and *drastic* defeat. But that is not what has occurred. The ruling class succeeded in making gains, but there have been few decisive battles or crushing blows to the proletariat. And even a victory for the capitalists such as occurred in Austin, Minnesota, with the setback of the P-9 strike, may end up as a double-edged sword—since it has stimulated the militancy (and may well spur the organization) of a certain layer of workers in the packinghouse industry.

The last few years have also experienced a deepening of the majority sentiment against U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean, as well as a steady growth of the movement in solidarity with the revolutionary struggles in that part of the world. Even at a time when most of the independent organizations of allies of the working class—women, Blacks, other oppressed nationalities, youth—were not very active, the Central America question held out significant opportunities for the revolutionary vanguard in the U.S. to increase its influence and prestige. Unfortunately, the sectarian approach of the SWP during much of this time led instead to its increased isolation on this question. (See "The Socialist Workers Party and the Struggle Against Imperialist War in the 1980s," by Tom Barrett, *Bulletin IDOM*, No. 37.)

As a final test of the validity of Barnes's explanation for the decline of the SWP we might take a look at what actually happened to those who were once members of the SWP but are no longer. Of course, a genuine scientific survey is impossible, but if Barnes's assertion is correct the overwhelming majority should simply have succumbed to demoralization and would now be politically inactive.

Yet any ex-party member who is familiar with the anti-intervention movement in this country today, who attended the last "Labor Notes" conference, or who knows the individuals involved in a myriad of local activities sponsored by various mass organizations around the country, can tell us that hundreds of those who were recruited to the SWP during the 1960s and early 70s and who left the party for a variety of reasons during the past decade remain politically active. Many who took industrial jobs as part of the turn have kept them, and became active militants in their unions *after* they dropped out of the SWP.

These cadre were lost to the party, but not to radical, even revolutionary, political work. On top of this we must add those who were expelled

during the anti-Trotskyist purge and who remain organized and active. These individuals, the party leadership explained at the time, "were retreating in the face of the imperialist war drive; succumbing to bourgeois pressures." Yet many of them have emerged as central leaders in the fight against U.S. intervention in Central America, as well as in trade union and other struggles.

All of this should give pause to anyone who would blithely accept Jack Barnes's convenient and schematic approach to history. It should stimulate present members of the party to ask themselves: "Have we done any things wrong which contributed to our own decline? Are there perhaps some lessons to be drawn for our organization which have not yet been drawn? Is there anything left out of the analysis our present leaders have given us?"

Basic Change?

We can have similar reservations about Barnes's assertion that 1986 marked a fundamental change in the objective conditions facing the revolutionary movement in this country. It is certainly true that there have been some modest shifts. The number of strikes increased last year. Workers have begun to understand that concessions do not lead to better times in the future, but only to demands for more concessions and greater attacks on their standard of living and their unions.

Nevertheless, the U.S. working class is still quite far from any kind of effective organization, even on a local or trade union level. The closest thing to an experience which taught a different strategic lesson was the struggle of P-9 in Austin, Minnesota. That, however, fell short of victory, which severely limits its use as an example for others. Despite all the publicity for P-9, the kind of fight it carried out hasn't yet been generalized—not even within the meatpacking industry.

We must remain cautious, therefore, in concluding that there has been any kind of dramatic shift in the retreat of the working class and its allies. Nothing has yet happened which, in and of itself, would lay the basis for a big new advance by the revolutionary party in the U.S.A.—though that might change at any time.

United Mine Workers

Among the perspectives outlined by Barnes in his report, and emphasized in the companion article from the Pittsburgh active workers conference, is a recommitment to work in the coal industry and the United Mine Workers union. Barnes asserts that the UMW is qualitatively different from the rest of the U.S. labor movement. According to the Jenness article, he "noted that the United Mine Workers (UMWA) is the only industrial union that has not been deeply set back by the employers' offensive. It has not been saddled with the same kind of big takeback contracts."

The reason for this, the SWP leadership explains, was the victory 15 years ago of the Miners

for Democracy movement. This created structures in the union for control by the rank and file which remain in place today. They strengthen the UMWA against attacks by the ruling class. "The fight for takebacks hasn't been posed in the same way in coal as in other industries yet. And when the employers decide to pose it, they'll have a different kind of fight on their hands than what faced them in auto and steel."

This same theme was repeated in the article on the active workers conference. Yet here, in reporting on comments by conference participants, the article itself poses some of the problems which the Barnes analysis chooses to leave aside: "Several speakers described how the coal bosses have stepped up their attacks on miners since 1984. Safety and working conditions have been seriously undermined.

"Tens of thousands of miners have been laid off. For example, there are 23,000 miners working in West Virginia today compared to 68,000 in 1978.

"About 40 percent of the coal mined in the country is done by UMWA members compared to 80 percent 10 years ago."

None of this has provoked a serious challenge from the union. It remains to be seen whether the UMWA will prove itself able to fight back in the future. It is not even guaranteed that the matter will be posed in the same way as it has been for other unions. So far, as we can see from the *Militant's* own figures, the ruling class has been pretty successful in undermining union conditions in coal without a head-on confrontation.

Anti-Imperialist Organization

On the international scene Barnes asserts that new opportunities are opening up for discussions among "communists" of various stripes, and even for "communist regroupment." The key occurrence here has been the formation of the Anti-Imperialist Organization of the Caribbean and Central America which, according to the Jenness article, "has united a broad range of groups."

That is true. This organization has within it a wide variety of perspectives and ideologies. They range from proletarian revolutionary (various components of the Castroist current) to petty-bourgeois radical, and even bourgeois liberal. This all-inclusiveness is, for Barnes, a very positive sign. In another context he tells about his participation in the 25th anniversary celebration of the founding of the FSLN in Managua last November: "I was especially impressed with the fact that all communists and liberation groups who support the Nicaraguan revolution were treated as equals."

But the SWP leadership ought to ask itself whether "support to the Nicaraguan revolution" or "anti-imperialism" is a sufficient basis for "communist unity." We have had a few experiences with this, from which the appropriate lessons ought to be drawn. In the 1960s the Castro leadership in Cuba attempted to organize the Organization of

Latin American Solidarity (OLAS), based loosely on opposition to U.S. imperialism and support for the Cuban revolution. Little was accomplished by OLAS, and it was subsequently dissolved at the initiative of Havana.

More recently, beginning in the late 1970s, the Cuban leadership was also the spearhead in a formation known as the Movement of Non-Aligned Nations. Its only cohesive political element was opposition to imperialism. But the fact that this formation was composed primarily of neo-colonial governments meant that it could not exercise any genuine independence from imperialism.

The Anti-Imperialist Organization is, of course, different from both OLAS and the Non-Aligned Movement. Its scope is more limited geographically; it is composed of both ruling government parties from a number of Caribbean and Central American countries, as well as non-governmental parties, radical currents, etc. But the fundamental political glue which is holding it together is nothing more than what existed with OLAS and the Non-Aligned Movement. Its unity is extremely tentative, hardly something to which we can attribute big new opportunities.

"Anti-imperialism" has a wide variation of meaning for individuals and groups with different political outlooks and different interests to defend. For revolutionary Marxists it means the overthrow of bourgeois rule and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the same words, "anti-imperialism," can be embraced by a liberal-bourgeois government in the semicolonial world and will simply mean allowing more room for native exploiters in the context of their domestic economy and the international market.

It is the most serious sort of error for a proletarian revolutionary to confuse these different kinds of "anti-imperialism," to muddle them together, to fail to make the necessary distinctions between them. Yet that is precisely the kind of "analysis" that the SWP leadership has consistently practiced. The current orientation toward the Anti-Imperialist Organization continues and deepens that error.

It is one thing for the Sandinistas, who must maneuver diplomatically in a very complex political environment, to treat all "who support the Nicaraguan revolution as equals" at their anniversary celebration. It is quite another for the leader of a revolutionary Marxist party in the United States, a party fraternally affiliated to the Fourth International, to do the same thing.

All those who "support" the Nicaraguan revolution (even those Barnes seems to include in his statement about "communists and liberation groups") are *not* equals in the programmatic sense, and that is what is key here. They range from Social Democrats and Stalinists to revolutionary Marxists. They include bourgeois liberals, petty-bourgeois radicals, and proletarian fighters. The distinctions between these elements are essential to the understanding of working people all across the globe who still have the task before them of

riding the world of imperialist domination and capitalist exploitation. There was a time when even the present leaders of the SWP would have taken pains to make the necessary distinctions. The fact that they now contribute to the confusion says a great deal about the real reasons for the decline of the organization which they lead.

"Communist Regroupment" and the New International?

The fact is that SWP leaders are incapable of making the necessary distinctions here. If they did, the futility of the course they have been charting for the SWP since 1979 would be clearly revealed. That political course has been based on the perspective of helping to bring about a "New International"—an international revolutionary formation based on the Cuban, Nicaraguan, and (until its overthrow) Grenadan revolutions.

The Barnes leadership is no closer to realizing that fantasy now than it was when it initially charted the perspective, but the creation of a group like the Anti-Imperialist Organization can create the illusion that some important step has been taken—at least for members of the party who have lost the habit of thinking critically. This illusion within the SWP is essential for the party's leadership, since the real reasons for the drastic decline of the organization have more to do with their mistaken political perspectives than with the "objective conditions" that Barnes cites in his plenum report, and he must above all hide that fact.

The party has been drifting politically for almost a decade, without a practical perspective which might enable it to grow. Its eyes have been focused on the Caribbean and Central America at the expense of the U.S. class struggle. That's one reason why it has missed the opportunities which did exist here, modest though they have been.

At the same time, the leadership of the SWP has been able to show no tangible results from its perspective of international regroupment. The long-range result can only be the demoralization of those who remained loyal to the Barnes faction through all of its twists and turns, its abandonment of the Trotskyist program, and the bureaucratic purge of the opposition. They need to see results which can justify their actions, yet actual results of the orientation have been pretty slim. Something has to be done. So Jack Barnes issues another promissory note for the New International, this time in the form of the Anti-Imperialist Organization, and attempts to explain the past away on the basis of "objective conditions."

Since it is impossible to do all of this while being honest about the facts, about what the Anti-Imperialist Organization really represents, about what the objective conditions have been, Barnes must ignore the facts. He can only hope that when reality comes crashing down around his head he will have some new ray of hope which he

will then be able to hold out to those who will still listen to him.

At the same time Barnes has raised the stakes, as we have noted, because in this plenum report—for the first time as far as this writer is aware—he projects revolutionary "regroupment" not only on an international scale, but for the United States as well. And it is presented as an immediate practical task.

Central to these new possibilities, according to Barnes, is the "historic crisis shaking the Soviet Union." Jenness reports: "This also opens up opportunities for political discussions among communists in different organizations in the United States." Barnes is quoted concerning the upcoming collection of Lenin's writings to be published by Pathfinder Press: "This can be the basis for a broad discussion among all those who consider themselves communists. It can contribute to breaking down old lines."

A number of questions should spring to mind for any serious revolutionary politician: Who are to be the SWP's partners in this "communist regroupment"? What sign do we have that there is any motion among these elements in the direction of revolutionary Marxist ideas which would justify such a regroupment perspective? What is to be the programmatic basis of this regroupment?

Barnes does not define who he means by "all those who consider themselves communists" (though we can definitely rule out ex-party members who remain loyal to the Fourth International, since the SWP continues to exclude all individuals who belong to the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, Socialist Action, and Solidarity from even entering its public bookstores or attending public events which the party sponsors). But if we take the hint he gives about the impact of the current Gorbachev reforms in the USSR, he can only be referring to the U.S. Communist Party and/or those in its milieu.

We know of no objective developments among these forces (or among any others in the U.S. radical movement today for that matter) which would support a regroupment perspective, and Barnes doesn't cite any. We can assume that if the opportunity existed to justify his new-found openings for "communist regroupment" on any other than the most abstract plane he would certainly have taken advantage of it.

The only "breaking down of old lines" which is a realistic possibility under present circumstances, therefore, consists of a further abandonment of those revolutionary Marxist positions still held by the SWP, more discoveries of "sectarian holdovers" from its Trotskyist past, a further jettisoning of those things which continue to divide the party from others "who consider themselves communists" in the United States. Unless it can be shown that some other forces are coming closer to revolutionary Marxist positions, the only way for the Barnes leadership to pursue regroupment is for them to get closer to the positions of non-revolutionary elements.

Of course, it is not guaranteed that the party leadership will actually pursue this new line. Simple practical problems, a cold shoulder from "others who consider themselves communists" may preclude it. But the very fact that it has been posed by Barnes raises serious new dangers to which all Fourth Internationalists in this country and around the world must be alert.

Problems of Method

The real key to changing the future fortunes of the SWP is rather different from the path outlined by Barnes in his plenum report. Reversing the programmatic changes, returning to a Trotskyist political perspective, is essential if the SWP is to move ahead in the future. Unless a current develops within the party ranks, or in its secondary leadership, which begins to take a real, hard, honest look at the errors of the last decade—*errors which hinge around the conscious abandonment of the Trotskyist program beginning in 1979*—there is no way the party can ultimately reverse its decline. This doesn't mean that the process will be a simple, linear one, that the SWP will continue to shrink without interruption. The fundamental question is not even reducible to one of the size or influence of the party. It is really a matter of the SWP's ability to become an effective revolutionary leadership for the U.S. working class.

There cannot be any *revolutionary* organization without serious attention being paid to the development of revolutionary program and theory. The Barnes current has proven itself to be totally incapable of applying a Marxist method, which is essential to theoretical development.

The political approach of the SWP's present leaders is characterized by empiricism, eclecticism, and a pragmatic schematism. The rich, multi-faceted reality of political events (i.e., its genuine dialectic) become reduced in their thought to a series of "yes or no" propositions. No serious analysis of events is presented, but rather a series of assertions to be accepted as true, without any effort to demonstrate their validity. There is also no consistent approach to theory. Ideas are grabbed from here or there as they are useful to make a particular point, without regard for their true import and significance in an overall theoretical construct. All of this serves whatever schema may currently be deemed efficacious for building the party.

This general methodology can be clearly recognized by anyone who reads Jenness's account of the current Barnes report. For those who may have previous experience in the party and with this leadership, the roots of these difficulties, the application of this method of political analysis will be appreciated as a problem with a long history.

The political grouping around Barnes got its first experience in revolutionary politics during the 1960s. The period in which they began to emerge as the leadership of the SWP coincided with

the development of the Vietnam war, and the movement against it in the United States. During that time members of the SWP liked to say that Vietnam was "the center of world politics." There was a very large degree of truth to this at the time, and it was primarily around the antiwar movement that the party was built during those years.

But the uniqueness of this situation was not recognized at the time—where one aspect of the class struggle was so completely dominant on the U.S. and, to a somewhat lesser extent, world political scene. A kind of one-sided approach to political life began to be seen as the norm within the party.

With the end of the Vietnam war, the SWP leadership tended to look for some other political phenomenon which would serve the same broad function as the antiwar movement, which could become a similar vehicle for building the party. The list of things which were tried, and which failed to produce the hoped-for results, is long. It includes the abortion-rights struggle in the early 1970s; school desegregation (around the time of the racists attacks against school bussing in Boston); the turn to small "community branches" of the party (as a result of a wild extrapolation of an individual experience with the struggle for community control of the schools in the Lower East Side of New York); the turn to basic industry; sponsoring trips to Grenada and Nicaragua; the National Black Independent Political Party; even, for a time, a projected "alliance with working farmers."

In the context of the turn to industry, party cadre were shifted from one plant to another in an effort to find *the key* situation where the SWP might meet revolutionary-minded workers and make major gains. Steel, auto, garment, coal (to which they have now returned in the present perspective along with meatpacking) were among the unions emphasized for a time, only to give way in a few months to a new "target industry." All ultimately proved a disappointment, because the expectations projected by party leaders were not in line with a serious analysis of the state of the U.S. class struggle. In general, a more profound analysis of the objective situation, a more multi-faceted approach to political activity, was needed. But the Barnes leadership had never really conquered the Marxist methodology which would have allowed it to make that analysis.

Of course, it must be stressed that all of these various twists and turns of the post-Vietnam period—up until the turn away from Trotskyism in 1979—were accompanied by a serious effort to project the current campaign to the membership, fit it into an overall programmatic context (to the extent that this was understood), and win the organization to it through a basically democratic process. But the 1979 "Cuba turn," followed by the turn to the "New International" in 1981, were at one and the same time, something qualitatively new, as well as extensions of this previous method.

They were an extension of the old because, once again an effort was being made to find *the*

central focus of international politics toward which the party could orient, a single aspect which could be abstracted from a much more complex international reality—something easily understood, easy to rally the party organization to—and which would win the SWP some influence and authority. In a real sense, the turn to Fidel Castro was a direct outgrowth of the party's frustration from having applied this schematic methodology for so long without success. The Barnes leadership extended its approach on a grand scale.

At the same time, however, the pro-Castroist turn represented the point at which a quantitative escalation of the old methodology reached a qualitative stage. For the first time, in order to project a campaign of this scope, the SWP leadership had to begin to fundamentally alter the programmatic traditions of the party. It also moved to impose its perspectives bureaucratically, keeping its overall goals secret from the membership, prohibiting discussion, and expelling anyone who dared to raise a critical voice.

These facts, above all else, illustrate the basic empirical and pragmatic methodology of the Barnes faction. The historic program of the party, its Trotskyism, was an obstacle to making some quick immediate gains which appeared to be possible through a link up with the Sandinistas, with Castro, and with the Grenadan revolution. Barnes decided, as all pragmatists do, that program was subordinate and secondary to immediate practical necessity, and the program was jettisoned without even a nod in the direction of a discussion in the SWP as a whole and without a serious effort to disprove the theories he was discarding.

How to Overcome the Crisis in the Party

From the *Militant's* report on the active workers conference, as well as from some objective factors which can be measured by those outside the SWP, it is quite clear that the party's organization is, to a significant degree, in a state of disarray. Plant-gate *Militant* sales, which had for a long time been the touchstone of the SWP's "proletarian orientation" have suffered a "significant erosion," according to Mac Warren who gave the main report to the conference on the decisions of the National Committee. Not enough attention is being paid to work in the industrial unions. Things must be tightened up. Even the casual observer of the SWP can see, for example, that its election campaigns in many cities over the last few years have been very much pro-forma events, with no vitality and little activity of any kind.

It is obvious that the new turn projected by the plenum is an attempt to rally the troops, to give the party a shot in the arm, and it may work for a period of time. Yet none of the perspectives presented in the plenum report can resolve the fundamental difficulties which confront the Socialist Workers Party today, since they do not go to the root of the programmatic problem.

Back in 1983, the two opposition currents which then existed within the National Committee of the SWP—the Fourth Internationalist Caucus and the Trotskyist Tendency, both since expelled—presented a joint document entitled, "A Platform to Overcome the Crisis in the Party" (published in *Bulletin IDOM*, No. 3, February 1984). The majority current in the NC, of course, rejected that platform, and even went so far as to ridicule the idea that there *was* a crisis in the organization. The crisis, they declared, was in the perspectives of the opposition. When the mass purge of the Trotskyist wing of the SWP took place in early 1984, the party leadership told the ranks that now, since the "disrupters" (some more colorful terms were also used) had been eliminated, the party would finally be able to move forward and to grow.

But the party continued to stagnate. In fact, things got worse. Today, with this plenum report by Barnes, even he must acknowledge, even if only tacitly, that the crisis pointed to by the opposition in 1983 was real, and had been affecting the organization for some time.

There are no gimmicks, no panaceas, no magic formulas which will overcome that crisis; nothing which can hide the present party leadership's responsibility for what has happened to the organization; no short cuts to the goal of forging a revolutionary Marxist vanguard in the United States—through regroupment with forces in the Stalinist milieu, or even for the present with the Castroist current.

What is necessary, as the documents of the opposition pointed out in 1983 and even before, is a rededication to a revolutionary Marxist program and method, a return to the road of the Fourth International. The only other course is for the SWP to face the prospect of becoming one more in a long series of footnotes to history—parties which exercised influence, which played a revolutionary role for a period of time, but which ultimately degenerated beyond recognition, becoming at best irrelevant in the struggle to liberate humanity from capitalist oppression, and at worst another obstacle in the path of that struggle. ■

March 31, 1987

U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOP'S ECONOMIC PASTORAL: A VIEW FROM AN UNEMPLOYED WORKER

by Charles McCollester

One of the saddest things about the whole sad Hunthausen affair was that the disciplining of the liberal bishop and resulting strains between the Vatican and the American bishops overshadowed the issuance of the final draft of the bishop's pastoral on the American economy. Those of us who hoped to see a flowering of public debate around such issues as the present collapse of American industry, the agony of the family farm, the link between Third World debt and the flood of cheap foreign imports were disappointed.

Conservative and laissez-faire apologists for capitalism inside and outside of the Church must

We are reprinting here a review of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Economic Justice for All, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1986). Charles McCollester was a Chief Steward for Local 610 of the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE) at the recently shut-down Union Switch & Signal plant in Swissvale, Pennsylvania. He is also a Catholic activist who has served on the board of directors of the Thomas Merton Center, a Catholic-initiated peace and justice group which has been influential in the Pittsburgh area over the past fifteen years. In addition to union work, McCollester has been involved in Central America anti-intervention activities and in the Tri-State Conference on Steel, an organization of trade union, religious and other activists concerned with steel plant closings in western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. Originally entitled "The Economic Pastoral: A View From the Mon Valley," this article is reprinted from the January 1987 issue of The New People, the monthly newsletter of the Thomas Merton Center. The Bulletin in Defense of Marxism doesn't agree with all of the ideas in this article—for example, McCollester's endorsement of the idea that "new cooperative structures of local ownership will give the community or region an added stake in businesses, and even more important, give these businesses a greater stake in the community," or his apparent opposition to foreign imports. At the same time, we feel that readers will be interested in what this article reflects in regard to radical stirrings within the religious and labor communities. We hope that it will stimulate thought and generate comments from our readers. For some initial discussion, see Paul LeBlanc's "Marxism, Christianity and Class Struggle" on page 21 of this issue.

be feeling a sense of relief that the economic pastoral has not yet repeated the great success of the peace pastoral in exciting press and media comment. Indeed, the intense pressure has succeeded in diluting somewhat the letter's content from the first draft. In particular the call for "economic democracy" that so stirred the Reaganite ire in the first draft has become a call to a new "American experiment" to secure economic justice and expand economic participation.

I have not had a chance to compare the three drafts (1984, 1985, 1986) in detail but my impression is that there has been some toning down in the intensity of the moral urgency. However, the pastoral continues to have many strengths as well as a few weaknesses.

The key weakness from a Pittsburgh perspective is the lack of direct attention provided the industrial collapse of our nation and the profound distress this event has caused to the blue-collar mill towns. It is ironic that the pastoral is most eloquent about the injustice of the Third World - U.S. economic relationship, but speaks only indirectly about their own rust-belt backyard. They speak clearly and powerfully on unemployment issues, but in the abstract, and are silent on the industrial heritage, and suffering of those heavily Catholic industrial millworkers. In this they are only reflecting the dominant media myopia, but one could have hoped for better.

This said however, the pastoral message and the letter from the bishops that accompanied it contains much that is positive and important.

In particular, they reassert important fundamental principles such as the priority of the poor. "The fundamental, moral criterion for all economic decisions, policies and institutions is this: They must be at the service of *all people, especially the poor*" [94] (all emphasis as in original). They reaffirm John Paul II's dramatic statement: "The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; production to meet human needs over production for military purposes." [94]

The bishops strongly assert the existence of personal and collective economic rights over and at times against the exigencies of the market place. Labor is an expression of a person's dignity and solidarity with others. All people have a right to employment with wages and benefits sufficient to sustain life in dignity.

One can understand the nervousness of the apologists for the freedoms of the market place. "The market system contributes to the success of the U.S. economy, but so do many efforts to forge economic institutions and public policies that enable *all* to share in the riches of the nation." [8]

A specific right asserted is "the establishment of a floor of material well-being on which all can stand." [74] To protect this right requires a society in which "fundamental human needs must come before the fulfillment of desires for luxury consumer goods, for profits not conducive to the common good and for unnecessary military hardware." [90] All this flows from the conviction that "*the poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation.*" (emphasis original).

The "social sin" of joblessness is as close as the bishops come to the issues haunting the Mon Valley. "Within the United States, individuals, families and local communities fall victim to a downward cycle of poverty generated by economic forces they are powerless to influence." [77] The economic forms of exclusion from the minimal levels of participation in the life of the human community are declared to be equally as harmful as political forms of exclusion (such as denial of the freedom of assembly, free speech or the vote).

The bishops project a vision of history that marches toward a "restored creation at the end of history" where "enmity and hatred will cease and justice and peace will reign." [53] I couldn't help but think of the Wobblies and their one big union when I read: "The Spirit of Christ labors in history to build up bonds of solidarity among all persons until that day on which their union is brought to perfection in the Kingdom of God." [64]

For Catholic social theory personal and community responsibility are linked and "human dignity can only be realized and protected in solidarity with others." While political rights are negative in the sense of opposing the interference of governments, or other forces, or individuals, economic rights are "empowerments that call for positive action by individuals and society at large." [81] Specifically, they cite rights to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care; a right to security in the event of sickness, unemployment and old age; and, most basic, the right to have a job and earn a living. [80]

The gospel of wealth so religiously followed in the era of Reagan is not embraced. Greed is cited as "the most evident form of moral underdevelopment." [75] The extreme inequalities of wealth so in vogue are seen as a "threat to the solidarity of the human community, for great disparities lead to deep social divisions and conflict." [74]

A person's right to employment is linked to another human right which is very unfashionable these days. "The church fully supports the right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working

conditions. . . . No one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity itself." [104] The bishops express opposition to organized union busting. They also call for mutuality of sacrifice when jobs are under pressure. "It is unfair to expect unions to make concessions if managers and shareholders do not make at least equal sacrifices." [106]

Another key position of the bishops runs directly counter to the Reagan tide. The achievement of basic social justice is an "inescapable duty for the whole society" which requires "an organized social response." Government is *not* the enemy. Indeed it has a moral function: "protecting human rights and securing basic justice for all members of the commonwealth." [122] For the bishops, democratic government is the instrument by which the people act together to protect their common values.

While the bishops strongly defend the right to private ownership of productive property, they also assert the public right to ownership. No one may use capital and natural resources without regard for others and society as a whole. Business must be a faithful trustee. "Short-term profits reaped at the cost of depletion of natural resources or the pollution of the environment violate this trust." [112] The pursuit of short-term profits can stunt the production of needed goods and services. [113] For these and other reasons, "the common good may sometimes demand that the right to own be limited by public involvement in the planning or ownership of certain sectors of the economy." [115] The bishops specifically endorse society's use of eminent domain for the common good.

John Paul II is quoted: "One cannot exclude the socialization, in suitable conditions, of certain means of production."

The bishops treat many other subjects and do an especially good job on world economic inequalities and the deepening U.S. agricultural crisis. I have attempted to give a Pittsburgh-centered analysis since the economic crisis here daily reaches new and more dangerous dimensions. The seemingly inexorable march of plant closings now actually threatens to totally eradicate industrial manufacturing in our area.

After gunpoint concessions bargaining, plant closings and runaways, one might think that the worst had passed. However, the present LTV bankruptcy adds a new and dangerous dimension to the situation. LTV's gutting of the pensions and benefits of life-long industrial workers threatens to set off a massive corporate assault on pensions. This action has caused fear and uncertainty for many, many families in Pittsburgh. Beyond individuals and families much of what remains of the battered Mon Valley economy rests on the bedrock of union negotiated pensions. If the pensions are raped, the Mon Valley will sink into an ever darker and more desperate economic situation.

The attack on pensions also throws into serious doubt the entire social contract between

capital and labor forged out of the labor upheavals of the 1930s. The economic gains and the relative social peace resulting from the upsurge of the CIO fueled four decades of national prosperity. Phil Murray's dream of industrial democracy was not realized, but industrial tyranny of the previous forty years was replaced by a system of government enforced labor law. This legal framework has been largely dismantled by Reagan and now the bankruptcy courts are finishing the job. Capitalists may well find that the assault on labor law was a classic example of short-term gain and long-term stupidity.

This beating down of labor will not go on indefinitely without a response. An indication of this was provided by the amazing eruption of the building trades workers on the downtown streets on November 3. 45,000 parading, militant and disciplined unionists not only shut down hundreds of worksites in a four or five county area, but they also shut down the Golden Triangle, giving that high-priced piece of real estate its most massive demonstration of working-class power since 1877.

Some building trades locals go back more than 100 years (this coming year marks the centennial of the Labor Day Parade in Pittsburgh). In labor's

darkest hour, its oldest segment lifted high labor's banner "Organized Labor. Born in Pittsburgh. Still Alive and Well!"

The noble principles of the bishop's pastoral deserve widespread discussion and distribution. They will only become a social reality if they inspire an organized social movement. The plight of the LTV retirees deserves the support of everyone in their struggle for justice. The possible dumping of the LTV steel assets on the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation also opens the possibility for a "nationalization by default." The Tri-State Conference on Steel and the Steel Valley Authority will be pressing city, county and state officials to get involved in defending the pensioners while energetically pursuing any possibilities for reopening facilities. As the bishops say: "New cooperative structures of local ownership will give the community or region an added stake in businesses, and even more important, give these businesses a greater stake in the community." [310]

Finally, the bishops challenge us "to discover in our own place and time what it means to be poor in spirit and 'the salt of the earth' and what it means to serve 'the least among us' and to 'hunger and thirst for justice!'" ■

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MARXISM, CHRISTIANITY AND CLASS STRUGGLE

by Paul Le Blanc

The publication in this issue of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* of Charles McColleston's commentary on the recent economic pastoral of the U.S. Catholic Bishops provides an occasion for beginning to examine the question of how Marxists view religion, particularly Christianity, which is the predominant religion in the United States.

There are many more forms of Christianity than there are even of currents claiming to be Marxist. What interests us here, however, are those Catholic and Protestant currents which have played such a significant role in the movements for progressive social change and human liberation in our time. Among groups opposing U.S. intervention in Central America and the threat of nuclear war, within the anti-apartheid and civil rights movements, and even within the labor movement (especially among the unemployed) over recent years, a significant number of liberal-to-radical Christian activists have played a very visible role. In other countries—Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala; South Africa; the Philippines; Poland—Christian activists have been in the forefront of militant popular mobilizations. In the 1960s and '70s, particularly in Europe, there was a vogue in what was called "the Christian-Marxist dialogue." Today Liberation Theology has shaken Latin America, with definite reverberations in our own country.¹

Obviously, all of this reflects the problems and the ferment of our time, but how are Marxists to understand and respond to these developments? Here it will be possible only to offer the beginnings of an answer.

A common view among many on the secular Left has been that religion is simply synonymous with superstition, "the opiate of the people" (to wrench a quote out of context from Marx), used to deaden the misery and the consciousness of the oppressed, peddled by a long line of reactionary Catholic Popes and of fundamentalist Protestant hucksters, or in some ways worse (because so incredibly boring) by sermonizing middle-class preachers overflowing with moralistic platitudes. The reality, of course, is somewhat more complex.

Traditions in the American Labor Movement

Religious traditions are deeply ingrained not only in our culture as a whole, but also very much in the history of the American labor movement. The early working-class resistance to the oppression of industrial capitalism was commonly permeated by an elemental sense of solidarity and social justice interlinked with religious values. Labor

historian Herbert Gutman has noted that in the last three-and-a-half decades of the nineteenth century "trade unionists, labor reformers, and even radicals—with the notable exception of Samuel Gompers and [Daniel] De Leon—shared a common faith in a just God, effused perfectionist doctrine, and warned of divine retribution against continuing injustice." He elaborated:

Trade unionists and reformers from Catholic backgrounds such as Joseph P. McDonnell, who had studied for the priesthood [before becoming a secretary to Karl Marx in the First International, then editor of the U.S. socialist weekly *Labor Standard*], and Terrence V. Powderly [of the Knights of Labor] frequently quoted the Sermon on the Mount. Important trade unionists and labor radicals reared as Protestants did the same. [National Labor Union leader William] Sylvis found no contradiction between his sympathies for the First International and his belief that the workers "task" was "to found the universal family—to build up the City of God" through trade unions which Sylvis called an "association of souls" formed by "the sons of God." . . . Eugene V. Debs bristled with Christian indignation at human suffering and cannot be understood outside that framework. From his prison cell after the Pullman debacle, Debs publicly celebrated Labor Day by declaring that it "would stand first in Labor's Millennium, that prophesied era when Christ shall begin in reign on the earth to continue a thousand years."²

Nor did the religious element mean a dilution of proletarian militancy. In the midst of the violent working-class upsurge which swept the country in 1877, a strikers' proclamation from Westport, Maryland thundered: "The working classes of every State in the Union are in our favor, and we feel confident that the God of the poor and oppressed of the earth is with us. Therefore, let the clashing of arms be heard; let the fiery elements be poured if they think it right, but in our right and in defense of our families, we shall conquer or we shall die." In a quieter vein, almost a century later, were the words of an obscure Black working-class lay preacher, Brother Theo Waters, addressed to a convention of the United Stone and Allied Products Workers of America, to which he was a delegate; a basic trade-union message is intertwined with a fundamental

Christian teaching about the moral responsibility of the individual: "We need to be union men at heart, and women, too. Pay your dues and stand up for what you think is right. . . . The union is just what we make it. If a union isn't strong, it is because we don't make it strong. If we want our union to be something, let us be something."³

Then, of course, there was James Connolly, active in the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement both in the United States and his native Ireland, who unashamedly combined Marxism with Catholicism. "It is not Socialism but capitalism that is opposed to religion," he insisted in 1909. "Capitalism is social cannibalism, the devouring of man by man, and under capitalism those who have the most of the pious attributes which are required for a truly deeply religious nature are the greatest failures and the heaviest sufferers." Connolly—like his comrade Jim Larkin, a pioneer of U.S. and Irish Communism in a later period—grasped Marx's *Capital* and the *Holy Bible* in each hand, insisting that there was no contradiction. "Religion, I hope, is not bound up with a system founded on buying human labor in the cheapest market and selling its product in the dearest; when the organized socialist working class tramples upon the capitalist class it will not be trampling upon a pillar of God's church but upon a blasphemous defiler of the Sanctuary, it will be rescuing the Faith from the impious vermin who made it noisome to the really religious men and women."⁴

Similarly, Reverend A.J. Muste came to believe that the problems inherent in capitalism "seem to be pretty fundamental for anyone who has the Christian philosophy of life and who is concerned about making the living of such a life possible on earth." This conviction propelled him into energetic efforts in union organizing, labor education, the battles of the unemployed and of the industrial working class; it brought him to revolutionary Marxism and finally into a leadership position in the American Trotskyist movement.⁵ Even when he returned to the Christian pacifist movement, he never fully shed his earlier Marxism, and he played an essential role in the antiwar and civil-rights movements. Looking back on his involvement, he noted:

In the first place, when you looked out on the scene of misery and desperation during the depression [of 1929-39], you saw that it was the radicals, the left-wingers, the people who had adopted some form of Marxian philosophy, who were *doing something* about the situation, who were banding people together for action, who were putting up a fight. Unless you were indifferent or despairing, you lined up with them. . . . Secondly, it was on the Left . . . that one found people who were truly "religious" in the sense that they were completely committed, they were betting their lives on the cause they embraced. Often they gave up ordinary comforts, security,

life itself, with a burning devotion which few Christians display toward the Christ whom they profess as Lord and incarnation of God. . . . Besides, the Left had the vision, the dream, of a classless and warless world, as the hackneyed phrase goes. This was a strong factor in making me feel that here, in a sense, was the true church. Here was the fellowship drawn together and drawn forward by the Judeo-Christian prophetic vision of "a new earth in which righteousness dwelleth."⁶

A Double-Edged Sword

And yet, religion has historically proved to be a double-edged sword within the workers' movement. Religious differences have often set workers against each other, sometimes also drawing workers of a particular faith into the ideological orbit of their exploiters who happen to profess the same faith. The Christian axioms of "turn the other cheek" and "the poor ye shall always have with you" have been used by defenders of the *status quo* (including the mainstream of organized religion) to persuade the oppressed to accept their fate. The message of obedience to the powers that be has been propagated: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resisteth shall receive to themselves damnation." (Romans 13:1-2) "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. . . . For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (Peter 2:17-19,21). The oppressed have been consoled: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12).

Largely in reaction to this utilization of Christianity by the oppressors, many in the radical labor movement came to view organized religion in terms epitomized in the song of Joe Hill, the bard of the Industrial Workers of the World:

Long-haired preachers come out every night,
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right.
But when asked about something to eat,
They will answer in voices so sweet
"You will eat bye and bye,
In that glorious land in the sky.
Work and pray, live on hay,
You'll get pie in the sky when you die."
(That's a lie!)⁷

Many angrily rejected such religion, declaring (in the words of an IWW placard during the 1912 Lawrence strike): "Arise!!! Slaves of the World!!! No God! No Master! One for all and all for one!" They

shared the conviction (articulated by Marxists such as Trotsky) that "religion is a kind of fictitious knowledge of the universe. This fiction has two sources: the weakness of man before nature, and the incoherence of social relations. . . . In order to pave the way for correct and real knowledge, it is necessary to remove fictitious knowledge."⁸ They turned to Galileo, Kepler, Darwin, to the materialist philosophers of the French Enlightenment, to Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason*, to the American agnostic Robert G. Ingersoll, and to the ideas of Marx and Engels—counterposing critical thinking and the natural and social sciences to what they perceived as the mind-clogging mysticism of religion.

The religious traditions of especially Christianity, however, had such resonance in the culture of the American working class that even secular radicals drew on its symbolism, counterposing the communitarian ideals of "the workingman of Nazareth" (who said it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven, and that the poor shall inherit the earth) to contemporary plutocratic representatives of Mammon. What's more, they found themselves in unions with many working-class activists who were firm religious believers, integrating at least to some extent Christian doctrine with the realities of the class struggle. Even the Catholic Church, long a bastion of traditionalism, adapted itself to the notion that, in the face of industrial capitalism, labor has certain rights which should be advanced and protected by trade unionism.

The role of the Catholic Church highlights the "double-edged" character of religion in the labor movement. While favoring unions and modest labor reforms, the Church hierarchy saw one of the primary roles of Catholics in the labor movement being to combat the "atheistic materialist" influence of socialists and communists within the working class. Labor historian Marc Karson has documented how the alliance between Catholic trade unionists and the bureaucratic-conservative current in the American Federation of Labor led by Samuel Gompers was a decisive factor in stopping the phenomenal growth of Socialist Party influence in the AFL during the early 1900s. In the 1930s, during the upsurge of industrial workers who formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations, Catholic trade unionists also played a major role. Many of them joined with "labor priests" in forming the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists to coordinate their activities. In the 1940s, however, the ACTU played a major role in mobilizing to destroy Communist Party influence in the CIO, joining with trade union conservatives and U.S. government agencies to red-bait and split the "left-wing" unions and to expel eleven allegedly "Commie outfits" from the CIO.⁹

One of the most energetic of these anti-Communist "labor priests," Father Charles Owen Rice of Pittsburgh, years later had second thoughts: "I think the purging of the left-wingers, the total purging of them, the cleaning out

of them from the labor movement, was tragic. I think it would have been better, and it would have made a much healthier labor movement, if we were able to have people of whatever persuasion remain in the unions and fight back and forth, as they were doing, and watch each other." Retrospectively he concluded of the unionists whom he helped to purge: "There really wasn't much you could fault them on [in] the way they handled their unions compared to the other CIO leaders."¹⁰ But by then the damage had been done.

In 1948 an intriguing confrontation took place—a debate between Father Rice and Max Shachtman, the head of the Workers Party, which still claimed to be a Trotskyist organization. The debate focused on the doctrines of Marxism vs. the doctrines of the Catholic Church, and it is worth reading even today. Presenting a more or less revolutionary Marxist position, Shachtman brilliantly argued—with incisive logic and telling documentation—that official doctrines and policies of the Church were permeated with a reactionary content which not only were inferior to the perspectives of Marxism but also detrimental to the labor movement itself.¹¹

In the years which followed, however, a remarkable evolution took place. Shachtman and many of his co-thinkers developed into ideologists for the conservative AFL-CIO bureaucracy, with a Cold War anti-communism which led them—among other things—to favor the brutal U.S. aggression in Vietnam. Rice, on the other hand, abandoned his own cold war anti-communism and, still a devout Catholic and now a Monsignor, became one of the most vocal critics of the U.S. war in Vietnam. He worked with radicals of all varieties—"new leftists," Communist Party members, revolutionary Marxists, etc.—on these and other major issues.

Stirrings in the Catholic Church

The evolution of Monsignor Rice hardly took place in a vacuum. The continued disastrous effects of "advanced" capitalism and its cash-nexus on human values and communities and the environment, the threat of nuclear holocaust, the deepening oppression of imperialism in the "underdeveloped" countries—all of this has generated struggles for liberation, for peace and social justice, which have had a profound impact on the Catholic Church. In the early 1960s, perhaps the most humane and popular Pope in history, Pope John XXIII, replaced the coldly reactionary policies of his predecessor with an orientation which condoned working even with atheistic communists for peace and social justice. At the Second Vatican Council these and similar progressive developments were codified, reflecting a radicalization taking place among many Catholics, including sections of the Church hierarchy.

In the late 1960s a pastoral letter issued by seventeen bishops of the "third world" called on the Church to avoid identification of religion "with the oppression of the poor and the workers,

with feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism." The second conference of Latin American Bishops held at Medellin, Colombia in 1968, termed as "institutionalized violence" the economic, social and political structures of their continent, dependent on what Pope Paul VI (John's successor) called "the international imperialism of money." Bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo of Cuernavaca, Mexico declared in 1970: "Only socialism can give Latin America a true development. . . . I believe that a socialist system best conforms to Christian principles of true brotherhood, justice, and peace." A number of priests decided to "use the analysis of Marxism because it is objective and scientific. But we are not Marxists. We are not able to understand Marx as a religion because we are Christians." Marxist or not, significant numbers of Catholic clergy were prepared to agree with the 1977 statement of El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero: "Once you pose the question of the defense of the poor in El Salvador, you call the whole thing into question. That is why they have no other recourse than to call us subversives—that is what we are." Shortly before he was murdered by a right-wing assassin in 1980, Romero declared: "When all peaceful means have been exhausted, the Church considers insurrection moral and justified." And, of course, Christian activists—including influential priests—have played a central role in the making of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.¹²

Such radical ferment in the Catholic Church is hardly confined to Latin America. Yet the development is, to put it mildly, uneven and contradictory. Large sectors of the Church hierarchy, including the conservative new Pope John Paul II, are hostile to this movement toward socialism, Marxism and revolution. Especially contested are challenges in the Church to the subordinate position of women (and related questions of the traditionalistic family and of women's right to choose whether or not to conceive or bear children), but also the role of the Church in regard to other social questions.

Traditionally, the Catholic Church, particularly in areas such as Latin America, has been intimately connected with the privileged classes and oppressive structures of society. This is also true of other major religious denominations, but the Catholic Church has often been especially enmeshed—through the personnel in its hierarchy and through its own economic investments—with the biases, interests and outlooks of ruling elites in feudal, semi-feudal and now capitalist contexts. There is also a long-standing policy of accommodating itself to the power of these elites in return for various material privileges and the granting of substantial authority to the Church (often control of education, the recognition of Catholicism as the official state religion, influence over various social activities, etc.)

Revolutionary movements which in any way challenge such authority and privileges—particularly movements influenced by Marxism, long viewed as the foremost ideological competitor—have tra-

ditionally been seen as an unmitigated Evil to be opposed by any means necessary. Powerful elements in the Church continue to hold this orientation. Even among more moderate, less reactionary elements in the Church, there is a preference for only modest reforms—rather than the revolutionary overthrow—of the *status quo*, and a fear of things getting out of control. Thus the bitter opposition of the most powerful Church figures in Nicaragua (and also of the Pope himself) to the popular Sandinista revolution. On the other hand, there is a powerful tendency within especially the upper echelons of the Catholic hierarchy—even in relation to the military-bureaucratic junta in Poland—to reach an understanding with repressive "powers that be" which involves mild reforms and concessions to the Church in return for Church officials urging moderation and "social peace" among the discontented. What's more, for every radical priest there are others who naturally shy away from conflict, preferring a more soothing religion-as-usual. And so compromises are effected within the Church as a whole. (As Charles McCollister notes in his article on the U.S. Bishops' economic pastoral, this dynamic results in a call for "economic democracy," which can be seen as an appeal for socialism, being diluted into a liberal vision of class harmony brought about by innovative reforms.)

In the United States, the Catholic Church hierarchy has so far not demonstrated an inclination to educate, agitate and organize its congregations around its relatively progressive official positions opposing U.S. intervention in Central America or favoring greater social justice in the U.S. (This is in stark contrast to its inclination to do just that around the question of opposing legal abortions.) Rather, progressive and radical Catholic activists constitute a small proportion in the Church—though they are a significant element within the peace and justice movements. Radical Catholics who go "too far," however, risk isolation within the Church, and perhaps reprimands and even more punitive measures as well.

In short, there are stirrings, there is flux, there are tensions—but there is hardly in the offing a generalized Catholic "holy war" on capitalist injustice. Given the dynamics described above, and the nature of the Church (an institutionalized mass rather than a mass movement), such a development seems unlikely.

Nonetheless, the radical stirrings within the Catholic Church, and among some other Christian denominations, have been profoundly significant. They dialectically reflect and impact upon a larger ferment in the population as a whole: they are an important factor which must be considered by all working to build mass movements for peace and justice and for socialism.

Marxist Clarity

For a revolutionary socialist activist, every person who is prepared to commit his or her ener-

gies to the struggle against one or another aspect of capitalist injustice is important; every person who is thinking critically, who is motivated by what we would recognize as humanist values, who is inclined toward thinking and doing something about the "larger social questions" and who is open to socialist ideas is important. A significant number of Christians, many from working-class backgrounds, can be described in this way. And while genuinely revolutionary Marxists are not inclined toward an "ecumenical" fuzziness which glosses over major differences in outlook—melting everything into a warm and useless puddle—neither are we narrow sectarians who prefer theoretical/theological disputes over living social movements. Within the context of building such movements, often with those who disagree with us, we utilize and test our theory, all the while sharing our own perceptions and ideas and proposals with other activists in the movements. The united front approach is fundamental to any Christian-Marxist dialogue worth having.

Revolutionary Marxists combine a firmness in their commitment to a principled program (socialism, to be achieved through class-struggle methods—mobilizing working people around immediate, democratic and transitional demands; political independence of the working class; etc.) with considerable flexibility in tactics. Combined with this, there must be—in the way we communicate with other activists and with those whom we are attempting to draw into our struggles—a creativi-

ty and sensitivity blended with honesty. We must tell people what we really believe, in a manner that makes it possible for them to hear what we are saying. In order to communicate in that way, it is important for us to be able to *listen*—to actually hear what others are saying, in order to gain insights into what they believe and also, hopefully, to gain insights into aspects of reality with which they have contact. All of this is also fundamental to the fruitfulness of any Christian-Marxist dialogue.

Finally, it is essential for Marxists to utilize and develop their scientific socialism—utilizing their dialectical and historical materialist tools, for example, to analyze world events and national realities, on the basis of this to refine strategic perspectives on how to effect social change, and related to this to gain a surer grasp of how class consciousness and socialist consciousness can be expected (and helped) to grow among working people. For us at the present, this would seem to include a scientific analysis of religion and of developments among those who are part of the religious community, particularly as these relate to an understanding of the larger social realities of our time and to future developments which may be possible in the consciousness and struggles of the working class.

The Marxist analysis of religion will be the focus of a future article, in a review of *The Meek and the Militant*, a study by the long-time U.S. Trotskyist Paul Siegel. ■

NOTES

1. The special "Religion and the Left" issue of Monthly Review, July-August 1984, provides material focusing on many of these developments.
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3. Labor Standard, July 28, 1877; Proceedings of the Thirtieth Constitutional Convention of the United Stone and Allied Products Workers of America, AFL-CIO/CLC, October 19-21, 1970.
4. P. Berresford Ellis, ed., James Connolly, Selected Writings (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 41. The anecdote on Larkin can be found in Bertram D. Wolfe, A Life in Two Centuries (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), p. 245.
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8. Paul F. Brissenden, The IWW, A Study of American Syndicalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), p. 294; Leon D. Trotsky, "The Significance and the Methods of Anti-Religious Propaganda," in Jerome Davis, ed., Labor Speaks for Itself on Religion, p. 171.
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10. Fred Halstead, Out Now! A Participant's Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War (New York: Monad Press, 1978), p. 251.
11. Father Charles Owen Rice and Max Shachtman, "A Debate on the Social Philosophy of Marxism Vs. Catholicism," New Internationalist, January 1949.
12. Benjamin Keen and Mark Wasserman, A Short History of Latin America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), pp. 483, 462. Also see Arthur F. McGovern, Marxism: An American Christian Perspective (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), pp. 90-131, 172-209.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION AND THE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

by Evelyn Sell

Beginning in 1955 with the Montgomery bus boycott, Blacks engaged in a continuous and mounting series of battles which destroyed Jim Crow laws throughout the South. The civil rights movement reached up into the U.S. Constitution and altered it through the addition of Article XXIV in 1964 which banned "any poll tax or other tax" used to deny voting rights in federal elections. The civil rights movement drove the lesson home once again: democratic rights can be won and enhanced only through actions mobilizing people to fight on their own behalf and, in this way, winning allies to their cause. The eruption, development and current activities of the civil rights movement is strong proof of the fragile nature of the democratic rights "guaranteed" in the U.S. Constitution.

The victories won during the 1950s and '60s were substantial and important—but they did not erase racist practices and attitudes which continue to plague this country. The depth of this racism was recently revealed by a seemingly mild activity undertaken by a state commission created to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the drafting of the U.S. Constitution. As a fund-raising project, the California Bicentennial Commission approved the sale of a history textbook which included the following "facts" about the southern slave system: "brutality was no more common in the black belt than among free labor elsewhere and that the slave owners were the worst victims of the system," and "The gangs [of slaves] in transit were usually a cheerful lot, though the presence of a number of the more vicious type sometimes made it necessary for them all to go in chains."

On January 17 of this year, a group of about 400 rock-throwing members and sympathizers of the Ku Klux Klan broke up an interracial "Brotherhood March" of 75 persons in Forsythe County, Georgia. A march called to protest this attack attracted over 20,000 demonstrators from around the U.S. A Black participant from Ohio explained, "It's time to start marching again because I'm not going back to the back of the bus."

It was the civil rights marches—and boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, mass rallies, freedom schools, and other creative tactics—which set the example and tone for other movements for social change during the 1960s. The mounting multiplication of struggles for democratic rights included students, Chicanos, women, Native Ameri-

cans, lesbians and gays, prisoners, Asian-Americans, Puerto Ricans, old people, and undocumented workers. All layers of the population were swept up in the movement against the war in Vietnam.

In the course of these struggles, previously-won rights were redefined and broadened. For example, during the protests against the Vietnam War, "freedom of speech" was interpreted to include the right to burn draft cards as a form of symbolic speech, and the right to wear black armbands in spite of school dress codes forbidding such items. The combination of the strength of the student movement of the 1960s with the popular movement against the Vietnam War were crucial elements in winning voting rights for eighteen-year-old citizens (Article XXVI, ratified in 1971).

Such hard-won victories provide a springboard for those involved in today's movements against U.S. intervention in Central America and against apartheid in South Africa, as well as other social protest movements: the women's rights movement which has launched a new campaign to win the federal Equal Rights Amendment; the fight to secure immigrants' rights; the movement against nuclear weapons—to name just a few. In their efforts to achieve their goals, today's activists can learn from the experiences of the radicals of 1776 and 1860.

There is a profound difference, however, between the struggles waged in our century and those which took place during the 1700s and 1800s. Conflicts are no longer taking place within the context of a young, vigorous and expanding capitalist system which advanced society by destroying outmoded institutions. A certain measure of democracy was part of the price the rising capitalist class was forced to pay to secure the support of the plebian masses against feudal powers and the slaveholders. But now, in the period of the "death agony of capitalism," the ruling class can't afford the luxury of democracy. Attacks against democratic rights are part of the capitalists' survival kit as they protect their profit-oriented interests.

Within this new historical context, struggles for democratic rights play a vital role in the process of lifting society into a new, higher stage of development. It is now the system of capitalism which is outmoded and a barrier to human progress. And, once again, it will take a revolution—a socialist revolution—to sweep away established institutions and create new forms which can meet the needs of the vast majority. This Third American Revolution will create the preconditions for a socialist society in which

This is the third and final article in the series by Evelyn Sell on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.

democratic rights will flourish. They will be essential.

Today's battles to win democratic demands are essentially revolutionary. This is true for several reasons.

A democratic situation provides the most favorable climate for the working class and all oppressed groups to organize, mobilize, and engage in actions. Unionizing farm workers, for example, involves rights such as freedom of assembly, speech and association. The defense of undocumented workers encompasses protection from unreasonable searches and seizures as well as due process of law.

Victories in defending and extending democratic rights provide impressive examples of how powerful an oppressed group is when it acts in a united and vigorous fashion. Others are then encouraged to pursue their demands—in all areas of life: economic, political, social. Each new triumph encourages people to engage in another struggle, and another, and another. Horizons are enlarged and people begin to feel they can achieve what once seemed to be "the impossible dream." This increases the potential for developing revolutionary consciousness, goals and activities. The preconditions for a revolutionary situation are strengthened when this rise in confidence is accompanied by a loss of faith in the ability of the powers-that-be to organize and run society in an acceptable manner.

The fights to exercise democratic rights help reveal the real nature of government structures which are supposed to serve all the people but, in reality, protect the interests of the capitalist class. Legislative bodies at all levels, federal and local police agencies, the armed services, and the courts are instruments of the bourgeois dictatorship which underlies the surface appearance of a classless neutrality.

The capitalists have inherited two contradictory legacies from the first two bourgeois democratic revolutions. They have secured ruling class powers and privileges *along with* democratic rights for the masses. The two legacies are becoming more and more mutually exclusive. To preserve their minority rule—their dictatorship over the majority—they must deny the democratic rights which encroach on capitalist controls. That puts the ruling class on a collision course with the majority of Americans who need democratic guarantees and have a profound attachment to democratic traditions.

Democratic rights are woven into the fabric of American life. Removing or weakening such rights is not like cutting off a decorative but unessential fringe. This basic feature of American life presents a contradiction not only to the capitalist class but, also, to the working class and its allies.

Most people in this country have illusions about bourgeois democracy. Those illusions promote faith in the ruling class and its political servants—but, at the same time, ideas about democracy promote revolutionary consciousness and activity. It's like an apple. Peel away the skin and get

down to the hard core; you'll find the seeds of a new beginning. Peel away the outer layer of illusion and you get to the hard core of insistence on democratic standards and the seeds of revolutionary understandings.

The scandals of Watergate and the Iran-contra scheme have speeded up the process of peeling away illusions about how undemocratically the U.S. government really functions. The Vietnam War and U.S. wars in Central America have spurred resistance to the power of the "military-industrial complex" to set foreign policy. The majority is claiming the right to determine questions of war and peace. Unlimited corporate greed, displayed in many different ways, restricts the majority's unalienable right to the "pursuit of happiness"—a democratic ideal enshrined in American ideology.

In addition to the traditional rights already noted, a whole new series of democratic demands are being pushed due to changing conditions in society.

In the area of medical technology alone, a host of issues have been raised—stretching and altering previously-held ideas on how rights should be defined. Now that bodies can be kept alive with machines, the right to die has been demanded by many. This involves the right to control one's own body—a concept advanced by the feminist movement in terms of abortion rights. Now that artificial insemination can result in the birth of healthy babies, surrogate motherhood is a fact of life—and an arena for court battles over the rights of a child-bearing mother versus the rights of a sperm-giving father (as in the current case of Baby M).

Developments in the field of nuclear physics pose what now could be the ultimate democratic question: who will control the awesome life-and-death powers of nuclear energy? Will it be the numerically-small but socially-dominant capitalist class? The class which has already dropped atom bombs on two cities, carries out dangerous nuclear testing, and continues to build up its nuclear arsenal? Will it be the majority in our society?

The answer depends on the actions of the working class which makes up the overwhelming bulk of the U.S. population. Unlike capitalists, working people are not driven by the profit motive to dominate world markets through force and manipulation. But like the capitalists in 1776 and 1860, U.S. workers will have to wage a revolutionary struggle against institutions upholding an oppressive regime which resists progressive change.

In 1776 and 1860 the bourgeoisie provided the leadership in resolving the problems posed by feudal and slave institutions; the mass of the people—the democratic forces—provided the fighting army. In the coming socialist revolution, however, the working class must provide both the leadership and the fighting ranks. In confronting the most powerful ruling class in history, American workers must carry out two crucial tasks: overcoming divisions within itself, and winning

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A TRIBUTE TO JOHN G. WRIGHT

By Alan Wald

1986 was the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Joseph Vanzler, better known by his pseudonym, John G. Wright. Wright joined the pioneer Trotskyist organization, the Communist League of America (CLA), in 1933, and was elected to the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1939. From then until his death at the age of fifty-four in 1956, Wright was a prolific translator of Trotsky's works and a contributor to the Trotskyist press on Soviet affairs and theoretical questions.

Although he left behind a relatively small and scattered body of original material, he was in my opinion among the most learned Marxist intellectuals of his generation. On July 23, 1976, George Novack's essay, "Role of a Leading Marxist Intellectual," appeared in the *Militant*, commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Wright's death. But I have seen nothing published about Wright since that time and fear that his life and writings may drift into obscurity, which has been the fate of so many of his Marxist and Trotskyist predecessors. As a contribution toward the preservation of Wright's work and memory, I have prepared the following biographical sketch based on interviews with some of his friends, political associates, and family members, and on an examination of materials at the Harvard University Records Office.

Born about 1902 in Samarkand, the burial place of Genghis Kahn in Central Asia, Vanzler was the brilliant son of an aging rabbi and a fourteen-year-old girl. One of six Jews permitted to attend a Czarist school, Usick, as he was always called by his family and friends, had learned Latin, French, Greek, vernacular Russian and Court Russian by the time he was eight.

In 1915, with Usick, his mother fled to Boston, where another relative had previously moved, and married Max Cohen, who later became the successful owner of the Paramount Coat Company. In 1919 Usick entered Harvard College to study chemistry. He left school in 1923 but returned in 1925-26, and left again without receiving a degree. Subsequently Usick married Edith Konikow, daughter of the pioneer Boston Trotskyist Dr. Antoinette Konikow, and began a career in colloidal chemistry. Eventually he established his own successful business, manufacturing contraceptive jelly.

Usick was learned in math and science as well as philosophy and literature. In September 1926, he contributed a study, "An Introduction to the Social Basis of Grecian Art" to V. F. Calverton's

Modern Quarterly. Then, in the early 1930s he helped to finance *Americana*, an irreverent, anarchistic magazine that was the brainchild of his friend Alexander King, the noted book illustrator and humorist. During these years he lived in New York, associating with a bohemian circle that included the novelist Maxwell Bodenheim and the painter DeHirsh Margules. In 1933 the eccentric businessman decided to follow his wife and mother-in-law into the Trotskyist movement.

Usick was six feet tall, stocky, with long black hair, bushy eyebrows, a thick mustache, and a wide expressive mouth that often seemed twisted, as if he were thinking an ironic thought. When angered, he would tend to go overboard, using harsh and vituperative polemical language that contradicted his rather gentle nature. At first he made a bad impression on the leaders of the CLA. Although the articles he wrote for the *New Internationalist* were quite sophisticated, he had previously struck up an association with Max Gould, who, under the party name B. J. Field, led an ultraleft faction and was twice expelled from the CLA. Usick, in fact, had joined the CLA in a frenzy in order to reform it.

He was active with Field in the 1934 New York hotel strike, but the factional struggle between Field and the leadership of James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman that ensued had a strong impact on him. He began to feel incompetent as a political leader and decided that his skills and talents lay elsewhere. Transforming himself from an individualistic intellectual into a party worker, he devoted himself to giving classes on Marxist philosophy, serving on the editorial boards of the party's newspaper and magazines, translating writings by Trotsky, and drafting many of the party's political resolutions.

Although he had an odd and volatile personality, he differed markedly from many radical intellectuals of the time in that he was not interested in eliciting personal recognition or being in the spotlight. Most of his efforts were devoted to improving the work of others, although he produced quite a few meticulous articles on contemporary Soviet politics and the American economy, as well as several on such diverse subjects as atomic energy and Feurbach's philosophy. While utterly devoted to socialist revolution, he nonetheless abhorred violence and was motivated by a desire for an ordered world.

Usick's work habits were a bit bizarre. For extended periods he would sit in utter silence; then, usually at an odd hour such as midnight or

6:00 A.M., typing very rapidly with one finger, he would produce the final version of an article that he had been contemplating. The rewrites had all been done in his head.

Usick's last years were unexpectedly difficult. When his marriage broke up in the 1940s he turned his business over to his former wife. Remarried in the early 1950s, with a new baby and financially strapped, he fell ill with pneumonia and suffered a heart attack, which forced him to spend nearly two years convalescing before another heart attack killed him in the spring of 1956.

Marxist activists interested in the life of John G. Wright may wish to consult the following sources, in addition to the essay by Novack cited

above: Obituary by Art Preis, *Militant*, July 2, 1956, p. 1; James P. Cannon, "Joseph Vanzler," *Notebook of an Agitator* (New York: Pioneer, 1958), pp. 360-62; and Alexander King, *Is There a Life after Birth?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), pp. 140-47. Among Wright's many impressive writings are "Trotsky's Struggle for the Fourth International" in the August 1946 issue of *Fourth International* and "Feuerbach—Philosopher of Marxism" in the fall 1956 issue of *International Socialist Review*. Dozens of additional essays can be located in James Nicklas, ed., *Index 1934-1960, New International, Fourth International, and International Socialist Review* (New York: International Socialist Review Publishing Company, 1961). ■

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the support of essential allies (such as women, Blacks, and other oppressed nationalities, small farmers, the middle class, students). Struggles for democratic demands and the defense of democratic rights will be a key part of fulfilling those two tasks.

A special role will be played by oppressed nationalities and national minorities. Overwhelmingly proletarian in composition and already tested in battles for system-shaking democratic demands, these forces will be in the forefront of the coming revolution.

The defense and extension of democratic rights will not be confined to the revolution, however. Taking the next step beyond capitalism will not automatically guarantee democracy. The racist, sexist, repressive heritage of capitalist society must be consciously understood and fought while building the foundations of the new socialist society. This understanding will be strengthened by knowing about the democratic heritage embodied in the previous American revolutions. These radical struggles and democratic victories can be celebrated by today's revolutionaries during this Bicentennial Year of the U.S. Constitution. ■

YEAR OF DECISION FOR U.S. LABOR The Hormel Strike and Beyond

by Dave Riehle and Frank Lovell

\$2.50

This reprint of articles from past issues of the *Bulletin IDOM* covers a momentous year in the development of the U.S. labor movement: the year of the strike by United Food and Commercial Workers Local P-9 in Austin, Minnesota, against the giant meat-processing firm of Geo. A. Hormel Inc. It tells some of the story of that strike and draws its lessons, as well as presenting a class-struggle viewpoint on the broader issues facing working people in the U.S. fighting to defend their standard of living today.

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NOTEBOOKS FOR THE GRANDCHILDREN

By Mikhail Baitalsky

8. How It Was and How It Became

"Life lets very few people in on what it is doing with them."—Boris Pasternak

Books about the youth during the first years of the revolution have become Soviet classics. Our children and grandchildren have formed a selective mental image of their grandparents. I met one grandmother after a thirty-seven year separation. By her voice, her laugh, and even her appearance, you could still recognize the cheerful Verochka. Her sister perished in 1937, and so did her brother, and her husband fell victim only because his sister-in-law, whom he scarcely knew, ended up displeasing the great leader.

Vera herself joined the party about thirty-five years ago—I knew her only as a Komsomol (Communist Youth) member. She worked at machines all her life and is sober and sensible about everything. She sees it all through a worker's eyes. She knows very well what took place during the 1930s—she herself had run from prosecutor to prosecutor in Leningrad trying to rescue her husband from the clutches of Yezhov's investigators.¹ And rescue him she did. Acquaintances meeting him on the street were surprised: "How is it that you are still alive?" By then, some things had become known to the people of Leningrad.

Vera knows much about those days. But she thinks that all the blame for the misfortunes that befell her family lies with her sister. If her sister had not voted against Stalin, she would not have been persecuted and her brother would still be alive.

Vera had almost no contact with her sister. She took care of her sister's child, who was very small, for two years, and that was the extent of their ties. And moreover, the sisters had never corresponded. The brother had never written to his bad sister at all. However, it is none other than her sister who is to blame for everything; of that, Vera is convinced. There was no need for her to draw fire to herself and, in the process, do her relatives a bad turn. But in fact tens of thousands (when speaking with Vera I did not yet know that it was not tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands) were killed who had always voted yes. But my argument has no impact on Vera.

She asked me not to use her last name. "What if your memoirs get published someday?"

"Well, what of it, Vera? Are you afraid?"

"Yes, I don't want our name involved. Who knows what might happen? It's nothing to me, I'm an old woman. But I have daughters."

In 1977, a manuscript totaling hundreds of pages arrived in this country from the Soviet Union—the memoirs of Mikhail Baitalsky, who was in his middle 70s at the time and living in Moscow. His work consists of a series of nine "notebooks" which describe his life as a Ukrainian Jewish revolutionary militant. He narrates how, as a teenager inspired by the October revolution, he joined the Communist Youth, tells about his participation in the Red Army during the Civil War years that followed 1917, his disenchantment with the developing bureaucracy under Stalin, and his subsequent experiences in Stalin's prison camps.

To the very end of his life Baitalsky remained devoted to the ideals of the October revolution. He says that he is writing "for the grandchildren" so that they can know the truth of the revolution's early years.

The first installment and an introduction by the translator, Marilyn Vogt-Downey, appeared in Bulletin IDOM No. 36, December 1986. With this chapter we begin Notebook II.

"What has this got to do with your daughters?"

"Who knows?"

Fine, I am complying with Vera's wish. I don't for a minute suspect her of betraying those things we devoted our youth to. But I would like to understand how such a psychology was formed.

Our conversation happened to take place on the tenth anniversary of Stalin's burial. His embalmed body had already been removed from the mausoleum.² But Vera stubbornly repeated: "Who knows what might happen?"

Vera calls me a romantic. She places no stock in words but has the highest respect for deeds. She is right. But how does she reconcile such contradictory ideas in her mind: the deeds, and "Who is to blame?" and "Who knows what might happen?" How did this choice Komsomol member of the 1920s arrive at her current views about the possibilities for speaking out?

* * *

Vitya Gorelov, signing my party application in the spring of 1923, could not determine my future. But he hoped that I would be worthy of the trust placed in me by my sponsor, the one recommending me for party membership.

Life took its course. We kept turning the wheel of the flat press and the pages of *Molodaya Gvardiya* kept rolling off. The streetcars began to move again, to Dalnita, toward the Dzhytov factory. Dzhytov returned to life. Volodya Marinin, one of our best young workers, was elected secretary of the cell. Shura Kholokholenko, our dear, simple, beloved Shura, became secretary of the Privokzal District Committee. A genuine intellectual from a proletarian background, he grew quickly. After several years, he shifted to party work and in 1937 found him in the Donbass, in the party's provincial committee. He was arrested and shot. The repression hit everyone who worked with him; some were imprisoned and some executed.

Volodya Marinin also disappeared in 1937. He was living in Klinia at the time and working as the director of a textile factory. At a party meeting, someone stood up and declared that he knew Marinin to be a clandestine Trotskyist. Terror seized everyone present. No one tried to verify this or even listen to anything Marinin might have to say. They hastened to prove their reliability and came forward one after another to brand him. Then and there, he was expelled from the party and on the same day dismissed from his post. He spent three days at home, tormented by uncertainty, and finally told his wife: "I am sure that my case has already been investigated. I am going to find out."

They went together, not to the party committee but to the place where he believed his case was being handled. This was the court of highest appeal.

"Wait for me outside," he told her. "I'm sure this won't take long."

She waited 19 years, until she was informed that in fact no case as such existed, and that her husband had been rehabilitated. But he was no longer alive.

At the same time that Marinin was arrested, they also arrested almost all the industrial leaders of the city. They too were posthumously rehabilitated.

Volodya Marinin, Shura Kholokholenko, and several other young people were, I would say, the nucleus of the Privokzal district Komsomol. Volodya was a very talented youth, still quite young even compared to the rest of us, and we were all very young. With an inquiring mind and mature beyond his years, he offered great hopes. Because the Komsomol was not very large in those days (only four or five hundred members in the whole district), the provincial committee of course knew virtually every member of the organization, especially if that particular member had done something to make a mark. They knew Volodya and Shura and—what was worse—they had devoted special attention to them. Both of them had been sent to school, and they had studied diligently. They had studied even before they were assigned to, not in a correspondence school—no such thing existed then—but at home and in the club. They were developing working-class lads, intellectuals, as one of my friends put it, in a populist sense, one of the most important ingredients of our time.

* * *

I have already told about some of the differences between the two Komsomol districts of which I was in turn a member. But they were different in yet another way to which at that time we didn't attach the slightest significance but which, it turns out, was important for history—or more precisely, for contemporary Soviet historians. I emphasize *contemporary* and *Soviet*. They erase from history everything that does not suit them today. They falsify history in order to give it the form they need. The fact is that there were many Jews in the Odessa Komsomol, particularly in the Moldavian district. It was almost 100 percent Jewish. Peresyps was about half Jewish. But in Privokzal, there weren't even a dozen Jews. But in those days, who thought about such things? Who was interested in counting?

We did not avoid the word "Jew," nor were we silent about it. We simply had little need for it. And we used the word "Russian" most often, as it related to literature: the circle for the study of Russian literature. In the provincial committee there was a section for work among Jewish youth, called "Jewsection" for short. For a long time, it didn't occur to me to think how this sounded.

I have on my desk my Komsomol card from that time. The year it was issued was 1921. On the first two pages—almost the whole form:

1. Full name.
2. Year of birth.
3. Social position.
4. Education.
5. Native language.
6. What other languages can you speak?
7. What special knowledge do you have?
8. Military training.
9. Family situation.
10. Do you live with a family?
11. Number of family members who are dependents.
12. When did you join the Komsomol?
13. Are you a member of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)? If so, the year you joined. See how detailed it was? But one question that is on the passport of every Soviet citizen today is missing.³

Every question on the old Komsomol card says a great deal. And the question that is absent says no less.

* * *

The story of Verochka and the old Komsomol card makes me shift from the twenties to the present. Not long ago I went to Odessa.

It was noon. I stood on the corner of Karl Marx and Zhukov Streets. The Odessa acacias were blooming just as they did when I was young and filled with eager expectations. My heart beat faster. Forty years had passed—forty revolutionary years.

The former Home for Worker Youth had changed little. But gone from the sidewalk is the cast-iron garden bench where Maryusa and I sat in the daytime hours before going to the club. "I remember, I was still a young married peasant woman." She would sing that song to me. The building had aged somewhat but its five stories were as imposing as ever. The stairs were falling to pieces,

the apartment doors were broken and dirty.

Here is the cherished door. I knock—there is no bell. There wasn't one in my day, either. A stocky man in a striped vest appears. He asks angrily who I'm looking for. I explain that I would like to see someone who had been living there since the prewar period.

"There are no such people here," he answers, still more angrily, and closes the door.

But I did manage to find some. They told me the history of the apartments. The fellow in the vest—he lives in Emma's former apartment—works on a merchant ship and often goes to foreign ports. He brings back odds and ends for which there is a market. It's obvious why he did not welcome an unfamiliar man.

In the room on the left, which Misha Yugov occupied until he got married, there now live two sisters of one of my friends who perished. One worked as the house manager after the war, ended up in some sort of trouble and was taken to court. The second one was, too—she worked as a cashier and was caught stealing.

To the right, facing the courtyard, is a room in which I initially lived with Rafa and Kostya Grebenkin. In 1937, it was occupied by Turin, a worker in the prosecutor's office. In their search for enemies of the people, they finally got to him. Workers in the judicial system most often ended up labeled as enemies for "liberalism," a word Stalin hated. If a prosecutor felt sorry for people or consulted the Soviet Constitution too often, he was a liberal. Turin was summoned to a meeting of the provincial committee bureau, charged with Trotskyism, and expelled from the party. He knew well what was in store for him the next day, and on arriving home, he hanged himself. Immediately thereafter, the apartment was placed under surveillance. But his wife, knowing that arrest now awaited her also, eluded the guard, locked herself in the bathroom, and also hanged herself.

Now the family of a worker lives in that room. They have heard something about this double suicide but are not interested in the causes, assuming it was an everyday tragedy. Hadn't the expectation of arrest become a way of life for Communists in those years? In 1935 in Ukraine, there were 453,000 Communists, but in 1938, there were only 285,000. Where did 37 percent of the organization go? How did 168,000 members of the party disappear?

To be expelled from the party but not arrested simply did not happen. To voluntarily leave the party meant to arouse suspicion. And under Stalin, it was half a step, maybe less, from suspicion to arrest. The ghosts of those who were arrested and shot and of those who took their own lives inhabit the former Home for Worker Youth on the corner of Karl Marx and Zhukov Streets.

I even visited the room where Vitya Gorelov had lived. A woman, a pensioner, lives alone there now. She is a party member. In her family, two people suffered at the hands of Stalin.

And I finally reach the door that is most memorable to me. It is locked.

In my time, this door was never locked. A pathetic little hook symbolically held it shut, but the lock did not work. Many doors in our dorm were not locked then, and I never kept a door key in my pocket. What did we have of value? Who would have had an eye on Rafa's green overcoat? But the comrades who had a leather jacket hanging on a nail in their room—great wealth for those days—they never locked their doors either. Our house commandant Markov was not the type to trouble himself worrying about keys. He guarded us with a pistol at his waist. Markov was small and with the huge stiff holster for his pistol, he seemed even smaller. He ascended the stairs like the wind, three at a time, and his blond, curly, classic forelock of a cavalryman of the Chervon Cossacks, Primakov corps, came out from under his peaked army hat with the red band. And his holster knocked against his hip.

After him, Fasolka, a gay, pimpled lad, became the commandant. He did not carry a pistol; there was a bunch of keys for offices in his pocket. But keys for living quarters he considered a detail unworthy of his time and effort.

Could it be that their two names could still by some miracle be indelibly written on the door? No, here you can't expect miracles. Who lives in this room now? A distinct smell of perfume wafts from within it.

During the Hitler occupation, a young woman settled here. She brought with her considerable furniture, explaining that it had been confiscated from Jews. The new woman was a close acquaintance of some prominent police official. He would bring her one thing or another and stay the night.

After the war, the policeman was caught and convicted. She did not take part in his activities and she was not put on trial. The room (and the furniture) remained hers.

She now serves in a planning office. Her room is locked—she has been issued a pass to the sanatorium. Oh, the problems some people have.

Outside, I look for the window. There it is—third from the left above the front door. How many times had I shouted, approaching in the morning: "Hey, Rafa and Maryusa, you sleepyheads, are you up?"

And Maryusa, emerging at the balcony door, would answer: "Wait, we're coming right down!"

Forty years have passed; forty years of the revolution. And there is not a trace of Rafa and Maryusa anywhere, not in the far-off tundra, nor in the room of our Home.

[Next month: "The Family of an Odessa Tailor"]

NOTES

1. Nicholas Yezhov became head of the Soviet political police in 1936.
2. Stalin's body was interred in Lenin's mausoleum at his death in 1953, but was removed after Khrushchev's "revelations" about his misrule.
3. All Soviet passports today designate the nationality of the bearer.

A NEW WEAPON IN THE TROTSKYIST ARSENAL

International Marxist Review, Volume 2, Number 2, Spring 1987. London, \$5.00.

Reviewed by Stuart Brown

Subscribers to the *International Marxist Review*, English language theoretical journal published under the auspices of the Fourth International, have had a long wait for the publication of the present issue, received in this country during March. The previous number came out last summer (the magazine is projected to appear three times a year). Nevertheless, the wait was not in vain. The spring 1987 *IMR* contains a wealth of useful and thought-provoking material.

Two items, billed as "discussion articles," deal directly with problems which have been paramount in the debate with the Barnes faction in the leadership of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party—one on South Africa and the other on the "workers' and farmers' government." A resolution adopted by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International last June is also included, "The Crisis of the PLO—a balance sheet," which gives a coherent revolutionary Marxist view of the present state of the Palestinian liberation movement. This stands in direct contrast to the uncritical adulation of Yassir Arafat and the PLO which appears periodically in the press of the SWP.

In addition to these items, there are thought-provoking articles on important topics, such as "Women and work in Western Europe," by Jacqueline Heinen; "The ideological crisis of the Italian workers' movement," by Livio Maitan; an exchange of letters between *Democrazia Proletaria* and *Liga Comunista Rivoluzionaria* in Italy; and "Bloody conflict in Yemen," by Salah Jaber.

South Africa

"Anti-imperialist struggles and class struggles," by Claude Gabriel, represents an important contribution to the debate within the Fourth International on the problem of the South African revolution. It is on this matter that Jack Barnes has gone the furthest, and has been the most explicit, in his anti-Trotsky, anti-permanent revolution campaign. Although Gabriel starts off on a rather abstract plane, he eventually succeeds in pointing out some of the most glaring contradictions in Barnes's theoretical work—which was developed in "The Coming Revolution in South Africa," in the fall 1985 issue of the theoretical review *New International*, published in the United States.

Gabriel presents a consistent defense of permanent revolution in the South African context: "Nobody denies that the freedom struggle in South Africa starts out on the terrain of democratic struggles. Our position is however that the strug-

gle for an *authentically* non-racial South Africa involves a development of class struggles, a particular role for the proletariat, the formation of a mass workers party, the destruction of the South African state as a bourgeois state and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (p. 110). And further on: "Where we differ from Barnes is not that we believe in the possibility of establishing *ipso facto* socialist property relations in South Africa. On the contrary, we think that only the dictatorship of the proletariat is capable of ridding this country of all vestiges of racial segregation. This distinction is fundamental but Barnes does not make it" (p. 111).

For a revolutionary Marxist, for one who has truly absorbed the transitional method inherent to a Trotskyist analysis, these points may seem elementary by now. Yet it is essential to repeat them, as Gabriel does, to counteract the ultraleft caricature of permanent revolution which Barnes constructs in order to have something he can polemicize against.

Workers' and Farmers' Government

Steve Bloom's article, "Four conceptions of the workers' and farmers' government," is also an important contribution to an understanding of the present differences between the majority of the FI and the U.S. SWP. It was on this question, the usage and meaning of the term "workers' and farmers' government," that Jack Barnes began his attack on permanent revolution—even before his famous speech, "Their Trotsky and Ours," in which he came out in the open, declaring permanent revolution (as he interpreted it) to be unnecessary baggage from Trotskyism's sectarian past.

Bloom's present article differs from most past discussions of this subject in that he does not present a polemic; it is not an attempt to defend one approach toward the "workers' and farmers' government" idea as against another. Instead his article is a historical survey of the way the use of that idea has evolved since it first appeared in the terminology of the Bolsheviks around the time of the 1917 revolution in Russia. As such it will be extremely useful for anyone who wants to gain a better understanding of *all* the various polemics on this question, including those written by Bloom himself in past issues of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.

Regroupment

U.S. readers will also find the exchange of correspondence between *Democrazia Proletaria* (DP) and the *Liga Comunista Rivoluzionaria* (LCR, Italian section of the Fourth International) to be of

special interest given the discussion which has been taking place among U.S. Fourth Internationalists about problems of revolutionary regroupment and party-building. DP proposes that the LCR join it—as the best way of advancing common activity and discussion in areas of disagreement. The LCR explains why it chooses not to pursue that course, preferring instead to take a united-front approach to mass activity while attempting, at the same time, to build a politically homogeneous revolutionary Marxist party based on a clear and principled proletarian-internationalist political perspective.

Of course, the specific tactical decision of the LCR not to merge with DP at this time cannot be derived simply or directly from programmatic considerations, nor can any direct parallel be made to the discussion taking place among expellees from the SWP. Nevertheless, the LCR's letter raises the basic questions which are of primary concern—the essential strategic problems which must always be taken into account when considering a tactical process of fusion or regroupment. This is its great strength and provides it with considerable relevance for discussions of similar problems by Fourth Internationalists in our own country and all over the world.

Regularity and Technical Problems

There are a number of problems having to do with copy-editing, proof-reading, and technical matters which we hope will get greater attention in future issues of the *International Marxist Review*. The inattention to detail in this area stands in stark contrast to the seriousness and depth of analysis presented in the articles themselves, and creates minor annoyances which readers of the *IMR* must overcome in order to appreciate its political benefits.

But our biggest complaint about this issue of the *IMR* remains that we had to wait so long for it to appear. The fact that the *New International*, which represents the views of the Barnesite faction of the FI, is doing worse (no new issue has come out since the fall of 1985) is not much consolation. The articles in the spring 1987 *IMR* constitute an important part of the process of educating the entire English-speaking revolutionary Marxist movement about the problems inherent in the present dispute in our world movement, as well as on other matters. That's the kind of thing we need more of, and we can only hope that the *IMR* will be produced with greater regularity in the future. ■

THE SANDINISTA REVOLUTION

The Sandinista Revolution: National Liberation and Social Transformation in Central America, by Carlos M. Vilas. Translated by Judy Butler. Monthly Review Press, 1986, 317 pp., \$12.00 paper.

Reviewed by Michael Livingston

There is much to learn from revolutions and the Nicaraguan revolution is especially rich in lessons. Carlos Vilas's, *The Sandinista Revolution*, winner of the prestigious Casa de las Americas prize, is one of the best overviews of that revolution to date. Vilas's book will be of particular interest to the readers of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* and other revolutionary socialists because it contains information and analysis crucial to the debates on the nature of the revolution and the validity of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

Vilas seeks to analyze those features of the Nicaraguan revolution that are unique to Nicaragua as well as those features shared by other revolutions in the third world. His study "centers on questions fundamental to understanding any revolution: its political project, its social bases, the

transformation that it generates, the strategy that orients it, and the enemies that confront it" (p. 9). He addresses these questions within an analysis of the development of capitalism in Nicaragua while at the same time paying attention to four interrelated issues—the issues of class, national sovereignty, economic development, and democracy.

The study benefits from Vilas's rich practical and theoretical background. An Argentinian lawyer, Vilas has taught at universities in Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Nicaragua. From 1980 to 1984 he worked for the Nicaraguan Ministry of Planning. He has published a number of books and articles on development and dependency in Latin America and the Caribbean, including *La Dominacion Imperialista en Argentina* (the domination of imperialism in Argentina).

A major strength of the current book is its analysis of the Nicaraguan class structure. Vilas shows how an understanding of the complex class structure of Nicaragua is indispensable to an understanding of the revolution and current political developments. Vilas begins his analysis by describing the development of peripheral capitalism in Nicaragua over the last 30 years. While not using the concept of combined and uneven development, his description closely corresponds to the meaning of the concept. Vilas analyzes Nicaraguan data to show that, contrary to what some believe, the extent of proletarianization was quite extensive, especially in the rural areas where the

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majority of the people still live. By the late 1970s, 29.3 percent of the rural population were proletarian and 38.4 percent were semiproletarian (semiproletarians being defined as peasants who had to work part of the year for wages because the land that they owned was too small to support themselves and their families). Another 22.3 percent of the rural population were classified as middle peasants. Vilas rejects the descriptions of the Nicaraguan rural workforce as subproletarian—engaged in seasonal salaried work for part of the year, usually in coffee or cotton harvests—for two reasons: first one does not stop being a proletarian because the relationship with one capitalist ends; second, most of the seasonal workers in the coffee and cotton harvests have been shown to engage in other types of salaried work at other times of the year. Previous estimates of the Nicaraguan proletariat have been based on the concept of subproletariat and as a consequence have sharply underestimated the size of the rural proletariat.

Urban Areas

The picture in the urban areas is more complex. By the end of the 1970s only about 20 percent of the economically active urban population was made up of proletarians. Many of the urban workforce were self-employed, engaging in petty commerce, artisanal production, or personal services. Vilas adds however that "to the degree to which proletarianization signifies *dispossession* of workers with respect to their means of production and subsistence, and not necessarily industrial *salarization*, it is clear that proletarianization was far-reaching, notwithstanding its slow development. It is also clear that a large proportion of the working masses was subordinated to capital in a formal manner—that is to say from outside the process of work itself—more than in a real one" (p. 67).

Further, according to Vilas's data, the urban industrial proletariat was not privileged in any sense of the term. Compared to the non-proletarianized urban workforce, they generally suffered from low wage levels, greater labor instability, and worse working conditions (including more harsh repression). As a consequence, "the proletarian family . . . does not reproduce itself exclusively, and at times not even *principally*, on the basis of a salary" (p. 68).

Vilas argues that, because of the class structure, the worker-peasant alliance in Nicaragua is essentially a rural-rural issue, not as some Marxists believe, an urban (workers)-rural (peasants) issue. Implicit in Vilas's description of the class structure in urban areas is a modified definition of the working class. His analysis suggests that the urban working class includes salaried workers, the unemployed (Marx's reserve army) and those not salaried but under the formal control of capital and undergoing a rapid process of proletarianization.

Vilas's modified definition of the working class is based on his analysis of the social groups who participated in the final insurrection against Somoza. Vilas shows that technicians, professionals, small merchants, entrepreneurs, and traders played virtually no role whatsoever in the insurrection. Instead, four social groups were dominant: students, tradespeople (artisans, workshop owners, food vendors, etc.), peasants, and the proletariat. Furthermore, the majority of student participants and the majority of proletarian participants were children of tradespeople. These four groups were, according to Vilas, the social subject of the revolution. When the concept of the proletariat is used traditionally, the emphasis is on the already existing salaried workers and the reserve army of the unemployed. Vilas argues that the social subject of the revolution was not the proletariat in this sense of the word. Rather, the working masses, the tradespeople and peasants who are increasingly impoverished and controlled by capitalism, and their children who are now proletarians and students, made the revolution. I believe that Vilas's broader definition of the working class emphasizes the historical nature of classes on the periphery of capitalism.

Role of the FSLN

A second major strength of Vilas's study is his analysis of the importance of politics in the revolution. Specifically, Vilas argues that the revolution was successful because of the presence of a vanguard and its program—the FSLN. According to the author, three factors came together in the triumph of the Sandinista revolution: the accelerated rate of capitalist development which caused increased proletarianization and immiseration; a dictatorial state which reproduced the exploitative structure and strengthened it and which isolated itself from other segments of the ruling class; and a vanguard organization "which was receptive to popular demands, articulated current struggles with the anti-imperialist tradition of the people, organized them and projected them to higher levels of consciousness and efficacy, and which knew how to capitalize on the internal contradictions of the dominant groups to the benefit of the popular project" (p. 91). The first and second factors (the capitalist development of Nicaragua and the dictatorial state) are found in many Latin American countries. It is the third factor, the vanguard, which is crucial to the success of the Nicaraguan revolution.

While arguing for the importance of the vanguard Vilas argues against the significance of economic crisis as a cause of the revolution. Using comparative data from other Latin American countries and from the decade before the revolution, Vilas shows that Nicaragua was not suffering an economic crisis prior to 1978 that was any different from the general crisis of capitalism. In some ways the Nicaraguan economy was not as hard-hit as the rest of Latin America. The eco-

conomic crisis that gripped Nicaragua in 1978-79 was a manifestation of a general political crisis in the ruling class caused by the advance of the Sandinista struggle.

The book has a number of other strengths. For instance, Vilas also examines the Sandinista strategy of national unity and mixed economy, the development of working class organizations, and the efforts to create a popular (as opposed to bourgeois) democracy.

Anti-Imperialist or Anti-Capitalist?

Vilas concludes his study by returning to the four issues which run through the questions he has been addressing—the issues of class, national sovereignty, economic development, and democracy. Vilas feels that his study indicates that the Sandinista revolution is currently an anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchy (but not anti-capitalist) revolution that seeks to ensure Nicaragua's independence from imperialism, develop the economy and build a popular democracy. The revolution is not "anti-capitalist," according to Vilas, because it does not seek to eliminate all capitalist relations of production. National unity is unity between the working class, the middle peasants, and small and medium-sized producers, he asserts. The state seeks to formally control the medium-sized and small producers and the middle peasants (as well as the bourgeoisie) in the same way that the capitalist state and the capitalist economy controlled them before, e.g., through control of the banking system and credit, regulation of work and

safety conditions, and through control of trade and taxation. This control is *not* exercised for the benefit of the capitalist class, but for the popular class: the workers, the peasants, and their allies. The state's control is exercised according to "the logic of the majority"; the human needs of the majority are placed above profits. This policy introduces an anti-capitalist dynamic absent from previous Nicaraguan regimes and other Central American countries.

Vilas's terminology differs from that of other commentators on Nicaragua. In substance, Vilas shows that the revolution is anti-imperialist and proletarian, not yet socialist, but with a strong socialist dynamic. The proletariat and its vanguard are trying to carry out the economic development of the country, ensure its independence from colonial powers, and institute democracy.

Vilas's study is bound to raise many questions while at the same time it is a significant contribution to ongoing debates about the Sandinista revolution and the value of concepts such as Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. While different in important details, his analysis strongly supports the analysis of the Nicaraguan revolution presented by Paul Le Blanc in these pages (*Bulletin IDOM* No. 32) and in his book, *Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua* as well as the general position of the Fourth International. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Vilas's analysis, *The Sandinista Revolution* should be read by everyone interested in Nicaragua or revolutionary transformation in the Third World. It is by far the best single book on the Nicaraguan revolution that has appeared in the last few years. ■

PERMANENT REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA

by Paul Le Blanc

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